THE BLOODY BEST IN TERROR!

FANGORIA®

VOL 2
#21

GUTSY SUBSCRIBER EDITION: Do you DARE read it?

FEATURING ALL-NEW FANGORIA HORROR

FANGORIA PUBLISHING

Press play on V/H/S/85!

SCOTT DERRICKSON
Analog Nightmares

DAVID BRUCKNER
Brain-breaking broadcast

NATASHA KERMANI
Perfomance art from beyond

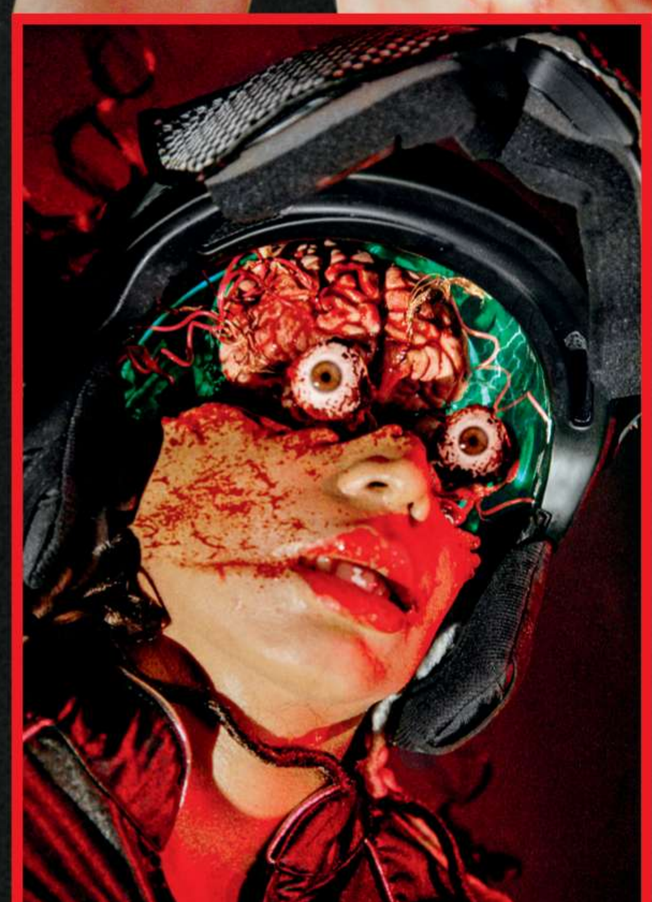
MIKE P. NELSON
A new kind of wrong turn

GIGI SAUL GUERRERO
Caught on tape!

Plus!

SUITABLE FLESH
Lusty Lovecraft Lives!

Barbara Crampton
Joe Lynch
David Gordon Green
Eddie Izzard
Stephen Graham Jones
Tananarive Due
Chris Nelson
Ve Neill
& Goth Dad!!!



Amazing Terrors:

SAW X
DOCTOR JEKYLL
VISION VIDEO
EXORCIST: BELIEVER
FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S
NIGHT SWIM

$19.79
0 71896 47909 6
21

PET SEMATARY
BLOODLINES

V/H/S/85 • DOCTOR JEKYLL

FANGORIA®

VOL 2
#21

MONSTER[illegible]ARRE CREATURES

FANGORIA PUBLISHING • FANGORIA PUBLISHING •

SUITABLE FLESH: BARBARA CRAMPTON'S RETURN TO LOVECRAFT

EXORCIST: BELIEVER CONVERTS THE SKEPTICS

VISION VIDEO: GOTH DAD'S ON A MISSION

SAW X GOING THROUGH IT

FANGORIA Nº 369 | OCT | 2023 | 23 | FANGORIA Nº 369 | OCT | 2023 | 23 | FANGORIA Nº 369 | OCT | 2023 | 23 | FANGORIA Nº 369 | OCT | 2023 | 23 |

FINAL GIRL

THE CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED
SOLO HORROR BOARD GAME

You crouch in the corner, silently screaming, tears running down your blood-stained cheeks. The bat in your hands seems like nothing against the carnage the killer has created. You force yourself to breathe, hearing the footsteps thud away, dig deep to find the rage beneath all your fear, and lunge forward to seek revenge, or at least survival.

In the award winning solo game, Final Girl, YOU are the heroine of the story. Choose your Feature Film with thematic killer and location. Each game will take you on a harrowing journey where you may destroy the killer...for now, or be slaughtered yourself.

BLOOD FRENZY
EPIC DARK POWER
When revealed, the Big Bad Wolf recovers for each dead Victim.
TASTY TREATS
LEGION
When Spawning Zombies, spawn one additional Zombie in the space nearest to you.
When this card is revealed, any remaining Exposed Victims are immediately eliminated.
Each Puppet ignores the first dealt to it each turn.
EPIC FINALE
ASSIMILATION

1 PLAYER | 20-60 MIN | AGES 14+

Look for Final Girl at Barnes & Noble, your local game store, or online at vanrydergames.com

VAN RYDER GAMES

OCTOBER 2023

FANGORIA

VOL 2
#21

GUTS

18 **LYNCH & CRAMPTON GET LOVECRAFTIAN WITH *SUITABLE FLESH*** *Michael Gingold*

23 **JEFFREY COMBS ON "THE THING ON THE DOORSTEP"** *Michael Gingold*

24 **SITTING DOWN WITH THE DIRECTORS OF *V/H/S/85*** *Amber T*

29 **EDDIE IZZARD IS *DOCTOR JEKYLL*** *Angel Melanson & Phil Nobile Jr.*

32 ***SAW X* THROWS BACK TO THE BEGINNING** *Vannah Taylor*

37 **THE LEGACY OF *SAW*** *Vannah Taylor*

40 **DAVID GORDON GREEN TALKS *THE EXORCIST: BELIEVER*** *Richard Newby*

45 **CHRIS NELSON: THE FX MAESTRO BEHIND *THE EXORCIST: BELIEVER*** *Richard Newby*

50 **EXHUMING GOD THROUGH *THE EXORCIST* FRANCHISE** *Richard Newby*

56 **MYTH, MAGIC, AND JACQUELINE CASTEL'S *MY ANIMAL*** *Laura Moss*

61 **DELIVER US FROM *SAINT DROGO*** *Sean Abley*

64 ***FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S* FINALLY HITS THE BIG SCREEN** *BJ Colangelo*

69 **EDDIE ALCAZAR ON NEW SCI-FI HORROR *DIVINITY*** *Brandon Wainerdi*

72 **AN INTERVIEW WITH VISION VIDEO'S GOTH DAD** *Phil Nobile Jr.*

77 **LINDSEY BEER GIVES THE LOWDOWN ON *PET SEMATARY: BLOODLINES*** *Brett Gallman*

81 ***TOTALLY KILLER*'S NAHNATCHKA KHAN IS KILLING IT** *Alyse Wax*

84 **SET VISIT: *DANTE'S HOTEL*** *Abbie Bernstein*

92 ***OUT THERE SCREAMING*: A NEW HORROR ANTHOLOGY BOOK EDITED BY JORDAN PEELE**

GRAVY

4 **INVOCATION** *Phil Nobile Jr.*

5 **THE POSTAL ZONE**

6 **MONSTER INVASION** *Brett Gallman*

10 **EXORDIUM** *Michael Gingold*

12 **SCENE QUEEN** *Barbara Crampton*

14 **SLASHER NATION** *Stephen Graham Jones*

88 **HOWARD BERGER: A CAREER IN MAKEUP FX** *Ve Neill*

94 **THE KINGCAST** *Scott Wampler*

96 **NIGHTMARE LIBRARY** *Ahlissa Eichhorn*

98 **CLASSIFIED AD VAULT/ THINGS TO COME**

Note: All interviews conducted with SAG-AFTRA and WGA members were conducted prior to the unions' respective strikes.

ON OUR COVER: (SUBSCRIBER VARIANT) *SUITABLE FLESH* PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHUDDER & RLJE + *V/H/S/85* COURTESY OF SHUDDER // (NEWSTAND VARIANT) *SAW X* PHOTO BY ALEXANDRO BOLAÑOS ESCAMILLA COURTESY OF LIONSGATE ENTERTAINMENT

FANGORIA

OCTOBER 2023
VOLUME 2 | ISSUE 21

Publishers
Tara Ansley & Abhi Goel

Editor-In-Chief
Phil Nobile Jr.

Senior Editor
Meredith Borders

Creative Director
Jason Kauzlarich

Operations Manager
Jimmy Shaw

Digital Editor
Angel Melanson

Contributing Editors
Kolleen Carney Hoepfner
Jacqueline Castel
Scott Wampler
Blayne Waterloo

VP of Ad Sales
Marisa Mirabal

Contributors
Sean Abley
Abbie Bernstein
BJ Colangelo
Barbara Crampton
Ahlissa Eichhorn
Brett Gallman
Michael Gingold
Stephen Graham Jones
Travis Knight
Laura Moss
Ve Neill
Richard Newby
Amber T
Vannah Taylor
Brandon Wainerdi
Alyse Wax

Special Thanks
Lauren Bantit
Creepy Duck Designs
Ryan Fons
Josh Goldbloom
Kate McEdwards
Brad Miska
Melissa Ramirez Ordonez
Yasmine Robinson
Damion Stene
Emily Teichner
Newell Todd
Chad Villella
Lauren Walsh
Katrina Wan
Judy Woloshen

This issue is dedicated to William Friedkin and Denise Baer.

© 2023 by FANGORIA Publishing, LLC. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without prior written permission. Printed in the U.S.A. To learn how we collect and use your information, visit the privacy link at FANGORIA.com. FANGORIA magazine is published four times a year, in January, April, July and October. This is Issue #21 of Volume 2 (ISSN 0164-2111). To learn more about subscriptions, please visit us at www.FANGORIA.com or email subscriptions@FANGORIA.com. For all other inquiries, please email info@FANGORIA.com. FANGORIA accepts no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts, photos, arts, or other materials, but we do consider freelance pitches via email at editorial@FANGORIA.com.

ALL UNCREDITED PHOTOS FROM FANGORIA VAULT

INVOCATION

New Eyes

During the ass end of this here pandemic, my sainted wife and I started looking at birds. Fully aware what a square, old person pastime it was, it nonetheless got us out of the house, it was free, and it was a pragmatic solution to a particular problem, giving us something new to do when our list of things to do had been involuntarily taken from us.

But the thing I really loved was the way it trained us to look at the same trees, shrubs, and skies we've been looking at for 15 years in a completely new way. It literally reset the way we look at our yard, our street, our neighborhood. Such a small, simple thing gave us new eyes with which to view the previously familiar, sometimes without leaving our porch.

I've been thinking about that effect lately, thanks to entitled movie fans whining that the SAG-AFTRA and WGA strikes are affecting their ability to see new movies on the schedule they want. I've actually seen this uninformed, bitchy attitude quite a bit in horror fandom and, putting aside my personal disappointment in any fan who isn't choosing the side of the creatives who make the things we love, the whining rings especially hollow in the halls of horror because not only do we horror fans have so much stuff to watch – literally, more movies than we're ever going to get around to in a lifetime – but labels like Second Sight, Vinegar Syndrome, Arrow and TerrorVision are doing hero shit, remastering movies we maybe haven't properly sat and watched since the VHS days. In fact, every month brings more titles that we get to see with new eyes: 4K transfers; alternate cuts; commentary tracks with first-person insight… surely enough to cushion the blow of a slight delay to your most-anticipated IMAX thingamajig.

Strikes aren't fun! The issue you're holding in your hands went through several adjustments due to the strikes, and it was a real pain in the ass! But you pivot. A cover photo shoot was supposed to happen, then couldn't. So you pivot. I've been a fan of Eddie Izzard for 25 years, and lost my voice the week before my scheduled interview with her for *Doctor Jekyll*. Angel Melanson stepped in and not only saved the piece from being canceled, but got a better interview than I would've. You roll with it and you pivot, and good things can happen.

I'm as sick of living through unprecedented times as the rest of you, and I would very much like for the shit to stop hitting the fan. But we're witnessing potentially historic change, and do you really want to look back and see that your contribution to the workers' rights issue of your day was "I whined on Twitter that *Dune: Part Two* didn't come out on time"?

You do what you want, but we stand with the striking workers and will keep pivoting as long as we need to. And until solutions are reached and fair deals are made (hopefully by the time this sees print), I guarantee you there's plenty of horror movies out there you can watch, with new eyes or otherwise.

Phil Nobile Jr., Editor-in-Chief

The Postal Zone

People are always asking us how they can have their writing or photos published in FANGORIA. Here you go! This is your space to get heard, get loud and get opinionated. Brevity is preferred; having a point of view is required. Hit us up at **MAIL@FANGORIA.COM**

TALK TO ME ABOUT *TALK TO ME*

I was like, "Well, i need to go see *Talk to Me* opening weekend and see what the fuss is all about because the Horror Community AT LARGE is freaking out about this!?" So, I saw it… but it was NOT *Scream*. It was not *It Follows*?? It wasn't even *Scream 2*. I felt it was on par with, like, an *Insidious* film, or something? If this flick was your new Holy Grail I'm happy for you. But EXPECTATIONS… They can be a bitch. They HAUNT me.
- sHANE tEA fRENCH

I've been thinking a lot about *Talk To Me*. With recent news that the Philippou brothers secretly shot a prequel and are working on a proper sequel, have we ever seen other YouTubers break in the horror movie space as successfully? Do we think this will start a trend with more YouTubers crossing over into the filmmaking space?
- Reyna Cervantes

Shane, I can't make you love a movie, but what was exciting for me about Talk To Me *was the voice. The way these dumbass kids were doing ghost possessions like Whippits was insanely authentic, and took it all to another level. I guess I was also super stoked at how cinematic it was, prepped as I'd been to see "a film by YouTubers," which brings me to Reyna's point. The Philippou brothers have set that bar incredibly high. Don't be coming at me with your hacky creepypasta nonsense, YouTubers. - PN*

REGION-FREE FOR YOU AND ME

In the year of our lord 2023, where we have unlimited access to most if not all media, I think most of us can agree that it is time to eliminate regional lockouts once and for all.
- Jökull Ernir Jónsson

I do not pretend to understand the region-coding logic of the video labels these days. Most 4K discs are now region-free, and with most viewers abandoning physical media altogether for streaming, it sure feels like we collectors are being picked on! But I have a region-free player, so ultimately they can do what they want; I will not be denied. - PN

WHAT ABOUT Gorezone ?

Are there any plans to do something with the GOREZONE name? I don't think the world could handle another magazine, but I could see using the name and attitude for a third podcast under the Fango banner.
-Jason Lees

I don't know about the world, but I definitely don't want to edit another magazine, so all I can say is "Who knows?" I think using the name GOREZONE for an audio-only format would be a mistake, but again, to be clear: I AM NOT VOLUNTEERING TO EDIT ANOTHER MAGAZINE. Thank you. - PN

WANTED! MORE READERS LIKE:

- Mauricio Pareja

- Bee and Simon Fraga

MONSTER INVASION

SUNG KANG GIVES YOU THE SHAKY SHIVERS

By Brett Gallman

BEST KNOWN FOR HIS ROLE AS HAN IN *THE FAST AND FURIOUS* SAGA, SUNG KANG IS AWARE THAT HIS DIRECTORIAL DEBUT MAY COME AS A SURPRISE TO AUDIENCES. "BECAUSE OF MY BACKGROUND, PEOPLE MIGHT EXPECT ME TO DO SOMETHING WITH CARS OR ACTION," HE REVEALS DURING AN INTERVIEW WITH FANGORIA. "BUT I WANTED TO DIRECT SOMETHING SMALL AND FUN, AND, EVEN THOUGH I COME FROM THAT SUNDANCE WORLD, I DIDN'T WANT TO DO A DRAMA OR COMING-OF-AGE FILM." INSTEAD, HE WENT VERY MUCH IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION WITH *SHAKY SHIVERS*, A HORROR COMEDY MONSTER MASH ABOUT FRIENDSHIP, ICE CREAM, WEREWOLVES, ZOMBIES – AND MUCH MORE.

Lucy (Brooke Markham) and Karen (VyVy Nguyen) are a couple of twenty-somethings still looking for some direction in their lives in the early '90s. Working together in a small town ice cream parlor, they lament that their best days may already be behind them. Even worse: those days weren't that great since neither can say they peaked in high school, and they've struggled to shed their teenage reputations even into the doldrums of adulthood. They encounter their fair share of memorable customers, like Karen Too (Skyler Day), an old classmate who insists on cashing in a free ice cream coupon that expired in 1987. But even she has nothing on the strange, disheveled woman (Erin Daniels) who wanders into the parlor with a wolf puppet that she uses to curse Lucy, who becomes convinced she's a werewolf. The two longtime friends then flee to a local camp, where a calamitous chain of events unfolds thanks to a Trapper Keeper

SUNG KANG SHIFTS GEARS (GET IT??) TO DIRECT HIS FIRST FEATURE.

KAREN (VYVY NGUYEN) AND LUCY (BROOKE MARKHAM) HAVE THEIR FRIENDSHIP UNIQUELY TESTED IN *SHAKY SHIVERS*.

full of *Dungeons & Dragons* spells that prove to be all too potent.

While *Shaky Shivers* bears many horror hallmarks, like gore and practical creature effects, the sweet, lighthearted tone of Andrew McAllister and Aaron Strongoni's script drew Kang to the project. In fact, he reveals that Strongoni wrote the film with his own young child in mind, and Kang seized on that. "This is a movie you can watch with your kids on a Sunday afternoon," he says. "It's a great way to share your love of horror with a younger generation without scaring them to death." Both Kang and the screenwriters see the film as a throwback to a specific strain of silly '80s horror that delights in practical effects and gore gags but keeps a light touch. "Movies where it's just people getting killed, full of blood and guts don't appeal to me," Kang admits.

"It's a great way to share your love of horror with a younger generation without scaring them to death."
- Sung Kang

Instead, he set out to have fun within the splatter realm, and the project originated from that space. After shooting a documentary on makeup effects legend Gabe Bartalos, McAllister and Strongoni found themselves wanting to scratch a horror itch. When Bartalos offered to work on any project they hatched, the duo felt like it was an imperative, and Kang was eager to get involved. "Aaron is my long-time writing partner, and even he was surprised when I showed interest," he explains. He was especially excited to work alongside Bartalos, whom he calls an "OG in the horror world," and he raves about the collaborative process.

Kang and Bartalos particularly bonded over their affection for *An American Werewolf in London*, which served as a major touchstone on *Shaky Shivers*. "That movie is still so funny, and the effects hold up today," Kang exclaims. Despite their project's low budget and limited resources, Kang and Bartalos wanted to craft a worthy homage to Rick Baker's work. "We only had about two hours to shoot our transformation scene," he reveals. "You should really have about five days." Still, he credits both Bartalos and Markham for pulling off the effect, noting that the latter embraced the silliness of the project.

Kang is also excited about the zombie designs Bartalos crafted. "I didn't want to have a basic zombie," he insists. Bartalos responded with a unique design that sports a distinct apparatus on the mouth, something that was inspired by the film's environment. "If you look, you'll notice that the mouths look like twigs and branches," Kang reveals. "At first, I wondered if a tree zombie would be too cheesy, but it wound up looking cool."

Kang is effusive with praise for Markham, who was the first actor

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CINEVERSE

BIGFOOT'S BIG FOOT.

SUNG KANG CONFERS WITH HERSCHEL SPARBER ON PROPER BIGFOOT MOTIVATION.

ERIC (JIMMY BELLINGER) GOES FROM SHOT TO WORSE.

cast for the project. "She did an audition tape, and I knew she was Lucy," he says. Casting the role of Karen proved to be a much more difficult process, so much so that Kang began to worry he'd never find a suitable actress. Eventually, he happened across Nguyen's work and knew she embodied what he was looking for. Putting her and Markham in the same room confirmed that the duo had the exact chemistry Kang was looking for. "Sometimes, you just know," he raves.

For Kang, the friendship between Lucy and Karen was his "north star" during production. Between its tonal shifts and its plethora of monsters, *Shaky Shivers* is a wild comedy of errors anchored by this infectious duo. Likening them to Bill and Ted and Wayne and Garth, Kang considers them to be loveable losers whose unwavering friendship is the heart of the film. "That theme of friendship and sticking by each other was wonderful," he says. "I thought that was a positive message," a sentiment that becomes a recurring theme throughout our interview.

Kang's long-time collaborator Timo Chen also played a pivotal role in honing the film's tone with a jaunty, oddball score. "Because we worked together in the past, Timo's contributions were one of the easiest parts of the production," Kang says. "He just gets it, and I'm grateful I had him to score the entire movie." One of the film's most notable throwbacks to vintage horror is a folksy end credits song written specifically for *Shaky Shivers*, which should delight audience members who fondly remember the likes of "The Ballad of Harry Warden." Kang is quick to solely credit Chen for the rustic tribute to Bigfoot accompanying the credits. "He asked if I just wanted to loop the score during the end credits, and I wasn't sure I wanted to," he explains. "Then he asked if he could just write a song, and of course I wanted him to do that."

Harnessing that nostalgia was another draw for Kang, who longs for the days of wandering through the video store and taking a stack of movies home for the weekend. "That was my childhood, and I wanted to recapture that," he says before revealing that the '90s setting was a matter of practicality and authenticity for him. "I'm not 20 years old anymore; I'm 51, and I can't speak to the experiences of kids today," he explains. He's still very much a kid at heart, though, as evidenced by his revelation that the film's soundscape is littered with barely perceptible fart noises. "[Editor] Wes Smith would be mad if I didn't mention this," he begins with a laugh. "But we went in and put 40-60 farts into the movie without telling the producers."

Kang admits that this directorial debut wasn't without its trials and tribulations. At one point, he wasn't sure what he was doing, and started doubting himself and his talents. However, the film's reception following its festival premiere eased his mind, and he's especially grateful to genre fans for appreciating what *Shaky Shivers* sets out to do. "I'm happy that the horror community understands this movie," Kang says. "It's nice to be understood, and, in many ways, it mirrors the characters' journey in the movie."

Shaky Shivers premieres on Screambox on October 17th.

NEW!

Chavant™ alien CLAY™

FOR PRECISION MODELING

10 EASY to REMOVE WEDGES

NET WT. 4.75 lbs. (2.15 kg)

AVAILABLE IN

SOFT

MEDIUM

HARD

SULFUR FREE | CONSISTENT QUALITY
LOW TACK FEEL | SILICONE FRIENDLY
CASTABLE | CAN BE MELTED & REMELTED

COOL GRAY COLOR

Alien Clay™ is a precision sculpting medium used for a variety of sculpting and fabrication applications. It is one of the most versatile clays available (sculpt, brush on, trowel on or pour) allowing for quick build-up and sculpting perfect detail. Use for sculpting finely detailed miniatures or life-size sculptures.

HEAT RESISTANT

Reusable Storage Container

STORE | MELT | POUR

The *Alien Clay*™ container is specially designed for storing, melting and pouring the clay. It has two hand holds and pour spouts to allow you to pour liquified clay directly from the container.

More Info:
ALIENCLAY.COM
CHAVANT.COM

The devil comes to Ohio in Tiffany McDaniel's breathtaking novel, THE SUMMER THAT MELTED EVERYTHING from the internationally bestselling author of BETTY and ON THE SAVAGE SIDE.

Fielding Bliss has never forgotten the summer of 1984: the year a heat wave scorched Breathed, Ohio.

The year he became friends with the devil.

Now available to buy on shelves and online.

TiffanyMcDaniel.com

THE SUMMER THAT MELTED EVERYTHING
A NOVEL
"A bold and surprising debut . . . warning us not to be too quick in judging what is evil and what is good."
—ROBERT MORGAN, New York Times bestselling author of Gap Creek
TIFFANY McDANIEL

Michael Gingold's

Exordium

MISSING THE BOAT

As I write these words, *The Last Voyage of the Demeter* has just finished its second weekend in theaters, and sadly, when it comes to the box office, that ship has sailed. André Øvredal's beautifully crafted, often quite scary take on the Dracula legend did just $2.5 million in business, following a disappointing $6.5-million start. It's an unfortunate return for a very solid film — one that, naturally, led the online pundits who make it their business to pontificate about such things to offer their two cents about why *Last Voyage* didn't connect.

Blame was leveled at everything from the title (What's a "Demeter"?) to the lack of big-name stars (like that's ever impeded horror before — or helped major films like Tom Cruise's *The Mummy*) to the trailer, which was described as too dark, confusing, whatever. As if it was the first horror preview to be set largely at night, and it actually spelled out both the premise and the horrific appeal quite clearly.

But there's nothing a certain species of internet writer loves more than to Monday-morning (or Sunday-night, or sometimes earlier) quarterback about why a movie has "flopped," often using all manner of specious reasoning with no basis in past box office histories.

This trend of rubbing salt in the wound (or dancing on the grave, to use a more horrific metaphor) of an unsuccessful picture is a constant factor on the web, with little sympathy paid to whether that movie is actually good, and might deserve a bigger viewership than it is receiving. And if some writers aren't demonstrating their alleged analytical skills regarding where and how a film and its marketing went wrong, they're speculating in advance about what movies are going to "bomb," based on conjecture, random associations, and the ever-popular, ever-dubious "tracking." Every month or so, it seems, there are online pieces letting us know in advance that an upcoming flick is going to fail at the box office. The assumptions they contain are often fallacious, but the headlines make for good clickbait.

This sort of sport at a movie's expense may have proliferated in the internet age, but didn't start with it. Predicting a production's doom has long been a part of Hollywood coverage; one of the more notorious examples occurred in 1977, when a financial writer named William Flanagan crashed a Dallas sneak preview of Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. The screening was intended to gauge audience response to help Spielberg and co. fine-tune their alien visitation drama, not for journalists, but Flanagan managed to wrangle his way in by paying an invited test audience member to switch driver's licenses with him. In an article in the November 7, '77 issue of *New York* magazine, he bragged at length about how he evaded the studio security, went on a lengthy diatribe against the film and proclaimed, "In my humble opinion, the picture will be a colossal flop. It lacks the dazzle,

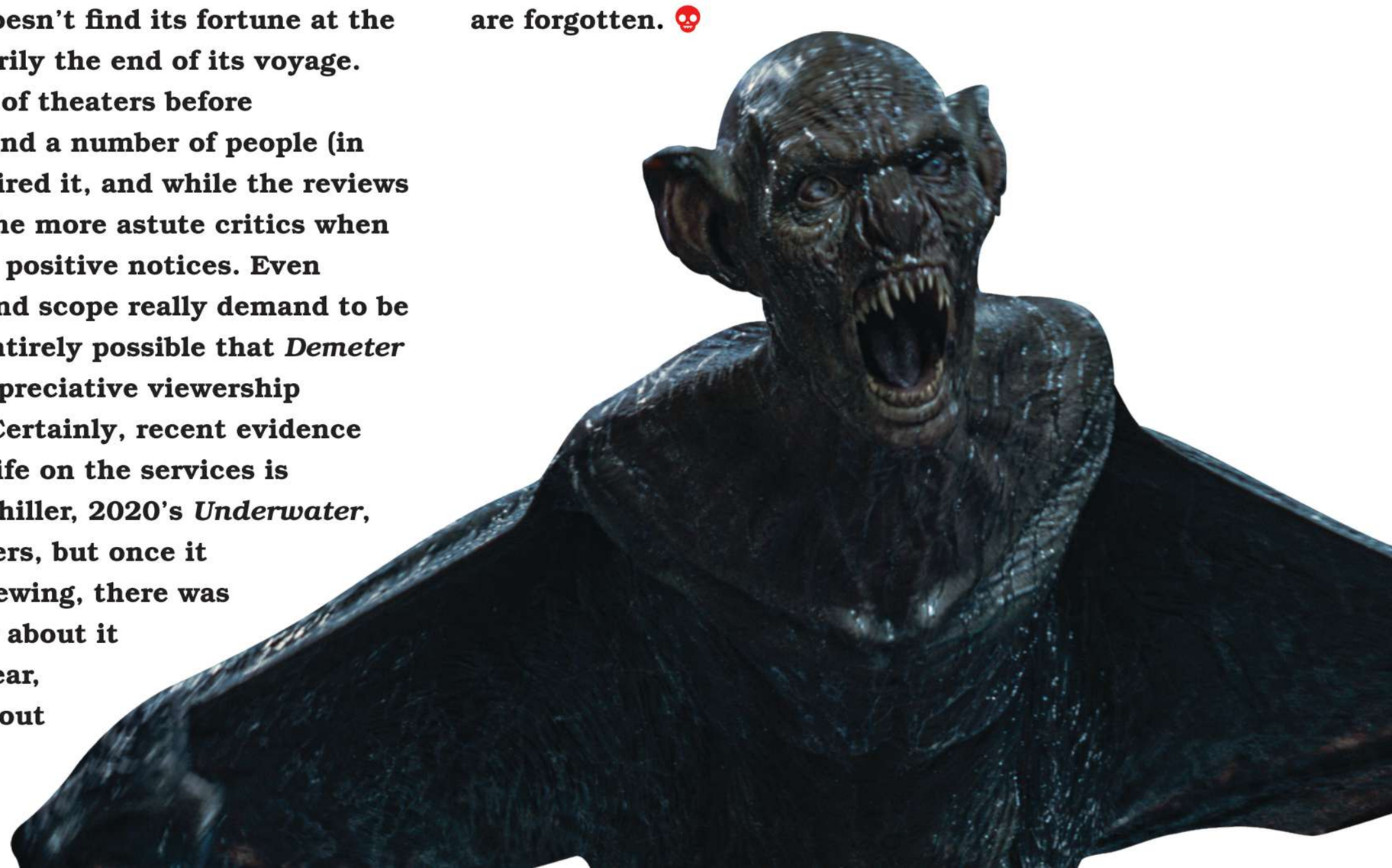
DEMETER FAILED TO GRAB AUDIENCES IN THEATERS — BUT GIVE IT TIME.

charm, wit, imagination, and broad audience appeal of *Star Wars*." (This "report" was accompanied by a six-panel comic depicting a UFO laying a giant egg on Devil's Tower.) Demonstrating the power print journalism had back then, Flanagan's piece actually sent the stock of *Close Encounters* studio Columbia Pictures briefly tumbling.

That story, of course, had a happy ending. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* premiered later that month to positive reviews and spectacular box office, and is now considered a classic of its genre. For those of us who follow and care about such things, seeing the naysayers proven wrong can be quite satisfying, as it certainly is for the filmmakers. If you ask me, after the endless advance coverage of *Titanic* and its ballooning budget, and all the hypothesizing about how it was going to tank, James Cameron had every right to take the Academy Awards stage after winning Best Director and proclaim, "I'm the king of the world!"

And even when a movie doesn't find its fortune at the box office, that's not necessarily the end of its voyage. *Demeter* may have sailed out of theaters before it deserved to, but it left behind a number of people (in my circles, anyway) who admired it, and while the reviews were wildly mixed, many of the more astute critics when it comes to genre fare gave it positive notices. Even though its impressive scale and scope really demand to be seen on the big screen, it's entirely possible that *Demeter* will find a larger and more appreciative viewership when it lands on streaming. Certainly, recent evidence demonstrates that a second life on the services is likely. Another oceanbound chiller, 2020's *Underwater*, barely made a ripple in theaters, but once it became available for home viewing, there was quite a bit of positive chatter about it on social media. Later that year, *The Empty Man* was dumped out during the worst of the pandemic to barely any business and negative reviews (with, ahem, one exception); streaming, however, helped it build an enthusiastic base among both critics and fans, and just a year after its commercial debut, it was honored with a retrospective screening at LA's Beyond Fest with director David A. Prior in attendance.

Horror history is full of features that survived box office rejection to become classics and cult darlings. John Carpenter's *The Thing* is perhaps the ultimate example, and no doubt everyone reading this editorial can name at least a couple of movies initially rejected by the moviegoing public — and in some cases even by genre buffs — that are among their favorites. Time has a way of validating good work that people didn't respond to the first time out, and I'll wager that Øvredal's spooky, finely wrought take on Dracula will be winning new admirers long after online noodlings such as "Why *The Last Voyage of the Demeter* Sank at the Box Office" are forgotten.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL PICTURES

SceneQueen

ON STRIKE!

OUR RESIDENT SAG-AFTRA CORRESPONDENT BREAKS DOWN THE INS AND OUTS OF PICKETING IN HOLLYWOOD.

BY BARBARA CRAMPTON

In 1984 I filmed a movie in Italy. It was one of my very best roles and the one for which I am perhaps best known. My fee for that movie was fifteen thousand dollars. That amount is equivalent to about forty-two thousand dollars today. As a young actress, I lived off that money for a year. I felt, at the time, kind of rich. In those old days the thirst for content was high. There was a buying frenzy all across America and Europe. VHS sales were huge. Producers could get the entire budget for a film covered by a clever poster, the promise of brutal kills, and beautiful femme fatales.

A lot has changed in forty years, and while it's never been easier to make a movie, it's harder than ever to make money from it. Fees for many established actors have gone down, not up. Distributors want to pay less. Everyone is crying poor: the actors, the producers, the crew, the studios and streamers. No one seems to be making any money. To quote a recent series, "One of Us Is Lying."

Unless an actor is a huge star, performers don't actually make that much money per job, particularly on independent productions. Indie producers scare together enough funds to make the film and are usually pinching pennies all through the shoot, while digging into their own fees. Equity financiers fund a film at their own peril and may not get their investment back upon a sale. Crowdfunding can help offset many production costs that buyers, studios and distributors aren't willing to pay, but that's never a guarantee.

Meanwhile, streamers claim they haven't garnered enough subscribers to warrant paying more for content, or paying actors residuals (compensation for reuse of material,

SCENES FROM A STRIKE: THE AUTHOR WITH (ABOVE) JUDIE ARONSON AND (BELOW) BILL MOSELEY AND HEATHER LANGENKAMP.

such as re-runs or repeat streams). They also claim to not be able to quantify which shows collect more views so that creators can share in the success of a hit show. All deals for creators on streaming series are made upfront, with no reward if a show becomes popular.

The result of all this change is that writers and actors want more than what we've been receiving, and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP) claim they can't give what's being requested. Hence, the strike.

So what is there for a creator to do during this strike? I am standing down, dreaming of future projects.

At the moment, I am unable to promote my latest movie, because I'm not just a producer on the film: I'm an actor in it. I cannot go to film festivals, do podcasts or interviews, be on a panel about anything specific or talk about past films unless I'm asked a direct question at a convention. I can still attend a convention as myself: Barbara Crampton, human actor and producer. I can say, "I love acting, making films, working with cool people and gardening" – but nothing about my acting roles. For now, I'm counting on director Joe Lynch, our distributor, our publicity team, journalists and horror fans to talk up our new work. I'm counting on fans to tell their friends.

Waivers are being granted for new independent productions if the producers agree to abide by whatever the final contract ends up being, so that's a possibility. Still, no one can sell a new movie until the strike ends.

And this strike doesn't just affect members of SAG-AFTRA (Screen Actors Guild – American Federation of Television and Radio Artists), the WGA (Writers Guild of America) or the AMPTP. The people who film and light our movies and television series are all without work. Costumers, caterers, makeup artists, grips and drivers are all victims of this standstill. Many, many people who work on the creative side of filmmaking are suffering to pay

THE GANG'S ALL HERE: JAMES JANISSE, CHELSEA REBECCA, DERIC A. HUGHES, BREA GRANT, MAGGIE LEVIN, BARBARA CRAMPTON, ERICA SCHREIBER, DUNCAN CRABTREE-IRELAND AND REBEKAH MCKENDRY.

their bills and feed their families. It's a desperate situation for many – and this, now, coming out of the pandemic.

The AMPTP claim they've *saved* money with the WGA and SAG-AFTRA strikes, and we've seen pictures of at least one executive lying comfortably on his yacht reading a book.

Actors and writers both need and deserve better wages. Most actors in the guild don't qualify for healthcare. The qualification? $26,470 in base earnings a year. Most actors have other sources of income and jobs to scrape by.

We are at a stalemate.

Also up for debate: are actors replaceable with Artificial Intelligence and YouTube performers? Are writers replaceable with ChatGPT? I hope not. I certainly think not. I don't have all the answers, and I'm not sure anyone does. But there are a few things I do know.

Our wonderful writers are a special breed, able to juggle the desires and motivations of a character and tell complex stories from different points of view in distinct tones. And as far as acting, a machine or an app cannot feel what I'm feeling, cannot cry real tears or understand the deep emotions of my human heart. I love what I do. Like most artists, I ache to perform. Sadly, many may not be able to continue in this profession unless negotiations improve our standard of living.

In another year this business may look very different. I penned this in early August. Perhaps by the time you read it, the strike will be over. In the meantime, I just want horror fans to know that I appreciate you. I appreciate the love and loyalty and excitement you have for what we do, and I can't wait to get back to work. 💀

THE AUTHOR WITH FELLOW QUEENS FELISSA ROSE AND BONNIE AARONS.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BARBARA CRAMPTON

Stephen Graham Jones'

SLASHER NATION

FOXES IN THE HENHOUSE

There's a lot of ways you can carve the slasher genre up. The go-to division is probably between supernatural slashers and slashers whose main power is their stabbiness. Chucky's undeniably supernatural — dolls without powers usually don't have this high a bodycount — but Ghostface wears body armor specifically because bullets *hurt*.

After that, there's slashers who speak, and there's those who don't. Freddy Krueger's a quipster, while Michael Myers is the strong, silent type — that mask has eyeholes, but there's no opening for words to make their way out, is there?

There's also territorial slashers and those who can range out, go where the victims are instead of waiting for them to be served up. Victor Crowley of *Hatchet*'s strictly territorial, while Death in *Final Destination* is a global traveler, probably has more hotel points than any of us.

Then there are those slashers who are locked to a holiday and those who can do their slashing all through the year. Michael's a Halloween kind of slasher, say, while part of Ghostface's appeal is he can show up whenever the killing's good.

There's slashers who wear a mask with such commitment that that's how they're known — think of a certain pissed-off goalie we all know and love — and then there's those less shy, who just run around with their face out for all the world to see, like in *Slumber Party Massacre*.

Finally, there's mystery slashers — who is that wearing the mask in *The Prowler*? In *My Bloody Valentine*? — and stories that are less whodunnit or whydunit, more embody that evergreen "Who will survive and what will be left of them?" Which is to say, we know full well *who*, and "why" isn't nearly as important as "How can the characters possibly survive?" *Friday the 13th* is a franchise that bridges from one to the other: in the original, we don't initially know who's picking these camp counselors off or why, but in most of the later installments — save the one with Roy — we know that it's Jason doing all this.

These are all useful distinctions, and none are in any way wrong, but my take is that the distinguishing characteristic between varieties of slashers that's the *most* helpful is simply that some have a reason for doing what they do, and some need no reason, just opportunity — killing is what they do. Once you clock the motivation or lack of motivation, the rest of the divisions tend to group under one heading or another.

So: the motivated. Which is to say, the revenge-minded. Those who have been wronged. Those who have, by their twisted logic, a *reason*. Marty in *Slaughter High* suffers a cruel prank, so comes back to dispense what he sees as justice. Same with Kenny in *Terror Train*, with Billy Loomis in *Scream*, with Pamela Voorhees in *Friday the 13th*, and on and on — revenge is the motivating factor in four out of every five slashers, easy. And, because these wronged individuals have been stewing on what they suffered for so long, the machinations of their grand plot tend to the grandiose. Even, as with *Dr. Phibes*, the theatric.

But those with no reason, the mad dog killers of the slasher world — that's where the slasher actually *starts*, isn't it? With that little kid in the clown costume who's empty inside, is pure evil, as Dr. Loomis says. Michael Myers in *Halloween* is the

THE TERRITORIAL VICTOR CROWLEY DOES HIS THING.

THE COMPLICATED CANDYMAN CONFOUNDS CATEGORIZATION.

prototype for the rest of these foxes let loose in the various hen houses the genre has to offer, but he isn't the last. Not even close. *StageFright*, *Slumber Party Massacre*, *The Hitcher*, *Pieces*, *Silent Night, Deadly Night* (documenting the pathology doesn't a motivation make), and on and bloodier. In all of these, very much including *Halloween*, a random brush with the 'escaped inmate' or 'lunatic' (to use the slasher's go-to term) means being targeted for this violent night. And, though Michael does wear a mask for his dirty work, and finally becomes something like supernatural, most of his mad dog killer descendants conform to the no-mask/non-supernatural Shape. As they tend to have just escaped an institution of some sort, too, they're usually not territorial either. And, while they probably could speak, and occasionally do, gibbering like Billy in *Black Christmas* — some even play guitar, to bloody ends — they usually let their blades and their drills do their talking.

What of Freddy Krueger, though, right? He the oddball here? Not really. He's just that rare case of mad dog killer who *himself* suffered abuse at the hands of an entitled group — the parents who went outside the justice system to enact some mob justice — and so then returned as a supernatural entity, just, one with a clearly stated objective: to take the children of that mob that did him wrong. As the installments progress, though, he mostly loses that motivation, and dials back to his pre–burned self: a fox let loose in the hen house of Springwood's dreams.

More peculiar, actually, are all the Attic Children — the boys (usually) who were hidden away at birth, where they metastasized into hulking killers. *The House on Sorority Row*. *Antropophagus*. *Humongous*. *The Fun House*. Not supernatural, not very verbal, and their faces tend to *be* the masks, yes? These killers are usually territorial, too, just, the henhouse they live in happens to *attract* chickens — the carnival, say, or the scary house people get dared to enter. Attic Children would seem to be revenge-driven, in that there's often mystery elements, and they have been grievously wronged, but . . . "Mad Dog" is finally a better fit for them, I think. Yes, they're misunderstood, are only "evil" by dint of having been mistreated, but all they know is to cut, tear, or chew anyone who stumbles into their slashing radius.

The real outlier, I think, is *Candyman*. Candyman was definitely wronged, but, after that, he becomes supernatural, speaks, is territorial, needs no mask, but he's no born killer, is more revenge-minded… sort of. It's all wonderfully complicated.

And? That's the great thing about the slasher: since it's so dependent on its formula, that means there's the by-the-numbers way to process through it, which always works and probably always will, but there's so much room for variation, cross-pollination, innovation. And, this division of all slashers between Revenge and Mad Dog Killer, it's not so strict as to dictate that elements of one can't bleed across to the other. Sometimes the trick to keeping a genre-savvy audience's expectations in a holding pattern is to feint towards this or that being Mad Dog, when, surprise, it's been Revenge along: there's a reason.

Or, it can get even more wonderful and complicated than that, can't it? *Bodies Bodies Bodies* and *Tucker and Dale vs Evil* each posit the question "What if there isn't really a slasher in this slasher story?" *Dark Night of the Scarecrow* probes how this formula works when there's no character in the final girl slot. *Alien* asks what if the killer isn't even human, yet the story contains all the standard slasher beats and characters? *Last Girl Standing* is concerned with the cycle of violence over time, not just over a bad Friday night. *It Follows* embodies its killer in novel fashion, but is sure to preserve all the stalking we can handle. *The Cabin in the Woods* adds a surprise level of bureaucracy to the proceedings, *Happy Death Day* brings time-travel loops, and on and wonderfully on. But, too, dial back to some of the prototypes, right?

We've had mad dog killers since *Psycho* — Norman's pretty much an Attic Child, as territorial as *Phantom of the Opera* — and we've had scheming revengers since at least *The Thirteenth Guest* and *Thirteen Women* (both 1932). They're what the slasher's made of.

So, your next slasher outing, clock the motivation, say? If you're surprised at the identity during the Reveal, when the mask comes off and the killer finally speaks, then you're in the Revenge type. If, however, the slasher doesn't care who sees their face, if they don't have many if any lines, if they're just protecting their little half-acre of hell from interlopers, then you may have a fox in the henhouse, doing some of that Mad Dog killing.

And, either way, you can be guaranteed that dawn is still a long, long ways off. 💀

ARROW

PRESENTS

BRAZIL'S BOOGEYMAN

READY TO SEND SHIVERS DOWN YOUR SPINE

INSIDE THE MIND OF COFFIN JOE

FEATURING...

- BRAND NEW 4K RESTORATIONS
- NEW ARTWORK BY BUTCHER BILLY
- BRAND NEW INTERVIEWS AND ARCHIVE EXTRAS
- AND MUCH MUCH MORE...

ON LIMITED EDITION BLU-RAY NOVEMBER 28

THE HORROR DOESN'T END THERE...

OUT NOW AND COMING SOON FROM ARROW VIDEO

SHOP DIRECT FOR EXCLUSIVE RELEASES, REWARD POINTS AND MORE

ARROWVIDEO.COM

ARROW VIDEO

By Michael Gingold

CRAZY, SEXY, GORY:

Joe Lynch's Suitable Flesh Goes All The Way

"When you get an email from Barbara Crampton that has a script by Dennis Paoli attached to it, you don't worry about the pandemic for a couple of minutes, you know?" That's director Joe Lynch describing how a Paoli screenplay based on H.P. Lovecraft's story "The Thing on the Doorstep" entered his world. "Being a huge Lovecraft fan and also a Stuart Gordon fan, I had known about the project because of [FANGORIA's] The Terror Teletype describing it years earlier when Stuart was trying to put it together. Then I read the script, and I got really excited about it, and the idea of doing a Lovecraft story with Dennis and Barbara."

That project emerged as *Suitable Flesh*, scheduled to arrive in theaters in October from RLJE Films and Shudder following a festival tour that included Tribeca (where Fango spoke with the cast and creators) and Fantasia (where we caught up with Lynch again). Heather Graham stars as Dr. Elizabeth Derby, a psychiatrist who takes the case of a severely troubled young man, Asa Waite (Judah Lewis). At first anxious and frightened, Asa undergoes a transformation before Dr. Derby's eyes into a more confident and sexually aggressive individual — who intrigues and seduces her, awakening untapped desires within her. It turns out, however, that Asa isn't quite himself; a rapacious, possessive entity has been jumping in and out of his body and that of his father Ephraim (Bruce Davison), and soon Dr. Derby is fully embroiled in what Lynch describes as "a Lovecraft triangle."

Lynch, who made his feature debut with the hardcore horror film *Wrong Turn 2* but has since specialized in more action-oriented fare such as *Everly*, *Mayhem*, and Netflix's *Point Blank*, relished the idea of tackling a full-fledged fear feature again. "If I was going to do another horror movie," he notes, "I didn't want to play it safe, whether people liked it or not. All the filmmakers that you and I and everybody grew up with in the '70s and '80s were not playing it safe. It was only later on, when horror became so commodified and homogenized, that people started to play for all the quadrants, and that wasn't the kind of movie I wanted to make. Dennis and Barbara and all the other producers on this were excited about that take, and we were off to the races."

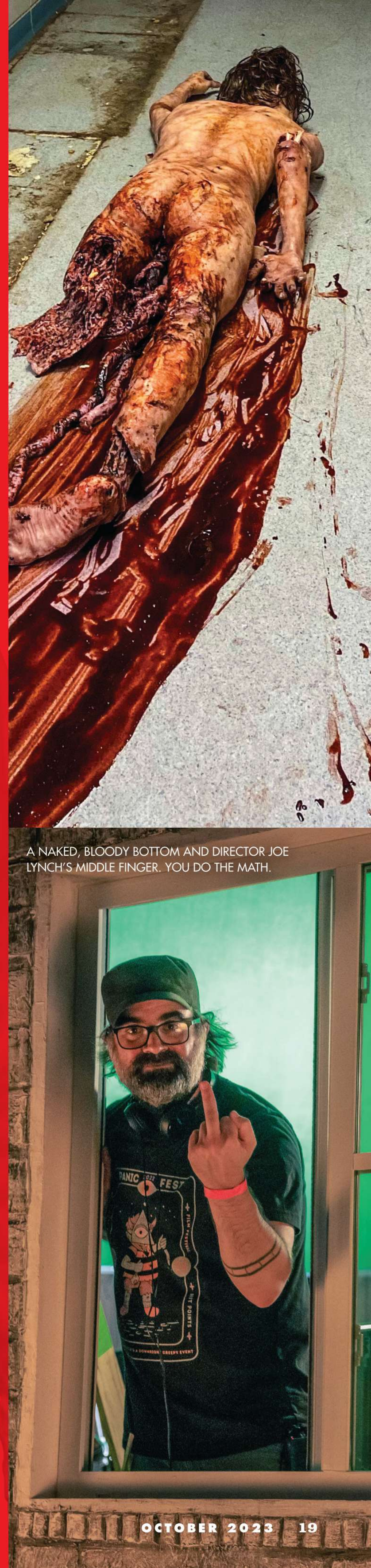
Indeed, Paoli's script was extreme enough in its carnal content that Jeffrey Combs turned it down back when Gordon was attempting to, er, mount it (see sidebar). After Gordon died in 2020, Paoli sent *Doorstep* to Crampton, who had become a producer with AMP International on films like *Jakob's Wife* and *Glorious*. She in turn passed it on to Lynch, with whom she'd collaborated on an episode of Shudder's *Creepshow*. As much as he loved it, there was one significant change the director wanted to make. In Lovecraft's story and Paoli's original draft, the protagonist was Edward Derby, and his best friend was Daniel Upton; it was Lynch's inspiration to change them to Elizabeth Derby and Dr. Daniella Upton, the latter played by Crampton herself.

"So many stories like this are told from a male point of view," Crampton says, "so to have one from a female point of view is a very cool change. It's telling a different story, one that we haven't seen a million times."

"I feel like most erotic thrillers are about the man's sexual desires," Graham adds, "and they're not about the woman being the protagonist and having those desires. So this is something rare."

Another difference between *Suitable Flesh*'s production and the way it likely would have gone back in the earlier 2000s has to do with the filming of those sexual situations. "I grew up in the age before intimacy coordinators," Graham says, "And I think it's great that people have them. But I find them so weird because I've never had a situation where I felt unsafe. And sometimes it's an extra person in there when you want to be connecting with the other actor."

On *Suitable Flesh*, "It was all about communication, honestly," Lynch says. "I wrote a 32-page document of



A NAKED, BLOODY BOTTOM AND DIRECTOR JOE LYNCH'S MIDDLE FINGER. YOU DO THE MATH.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHUDDER / RLJE

exactly how I was going to shoot that stuff so everybody was on the same page. The lawyers knew, everybody knew, to the point where I was actually having my partner take pictures of how I was shooting a butt, just to show people, 'This is exactly how we're going to do it.' You will never see those photos! [*laughs*] But it really does come down to communication and consent — exactly how it should be when there are no cameras around. We wanted to create a spontaneity, we wanted to create the eroticism, and I'm not slagging on anyone, but certain sex scenes you see today feel very distant and mechanical, and there's not a lot of passion involved. So that was something we wanted to create from the get-go, while making sure everybody was comfortable. We had a closed set, and the crew was very respectful of that, and then we just let loose from there."

As the instigator of the eroticism, Lewis (especially in person) almost looks too young to have played his part; after all, it wasn't very long ago that he was portraying a preteen and then a high-schooler in the *Babysitter* movies. Yet Lewis, who completely nails the challenging role of Asa, doesn't look at his various roles in comparative terms. "For me, it's about approaching each one individually, and Joe was incredibly helpful with that," he says. "I believe that once you get deep enough into the mindset of a character, the age doesn't matter so much, the maturity doesn't matter so much, because you're just present in that moment."

As it happened, Lewis came highly recommended to Lynch by Samara Weaving, star of both *Mayhem* and the *Babysitter*s. "She kept raving about this kid, and I was like, 'Oh God, I'm so sick of hearing about him!' [*laughs*] But when we were looking for the right Asa, it had to be someone who could play not only a very young man who's been put in this horrible situation, but other roles as well. And having seen Judah's work, and knowing what we had to put him through, it took just 10 minutes into a Zoom call with him and I knew he was the one."

In a sense, Graham, Lewis, and Davison all play the same role at different points as the malignance takes up residence in their characters. Yet the actors agree that giving the same performance in that situation wasn't part of the approach. "Something we talked about a lot was not wanting to parody each other," Lewis explains, "and wanting it to be built from the inside out, where we were feeling the essence of that character. That kind of dictated the physicality, and that way everybody arrived at the same conclusion, but at the same time, we weren't saying, 'Oh, they did this exact thing, so I'm going to copy that.'"

"The hand gesture when we were going through that changing process," Graham adds, "was one thing we all tried to get on the same page with, how our hands were going to be. We also did a Zoom read-through, because it was during the pandemic, so we got to see how Bruce and Judah did it. But it was less about imitating each other and more about the essence of the character, which was also in the writing."

There's a fifth player in this twisted scenario, who functions as a sort of straight man in the midst of all the craziness: Johnathon Schaech as Dr. Derby's husband, who's neglecting her needs in the bedroom. "He's vastly different from a lot of the roles I've played before," the actor says. "Usually I'm the aggressor, the bad guy, the villain, and I just had to be submissive in a lot of ways."

"We talked about film noir a lot," Lynch says, "where Judah, instead of the femme fatale, is playing the homme fatale. And another noir trope that

DR. ELIZABETH DERBY (HEATHER GRAHAM) HAS A STORY NO ONE WILL BELIEVE, THOUGH HER FRIEND DR. DANIELLA UPTON (BARBARA CRAMPTON) COMES TO SUSPECT THE TRUTH.

EPHRAIM (BRUCE DAVISON) SUPPLIES THE REDS, AND THEN SOME.

“IF I WAS GOING TO DO ANOTHER HORROR MOVIE, I DIDN’T WANT TO PLAY IT SAFE, WHETHER PEOPLE LIKED IT OR NOT. ALL THE FILMMAKERS THAT YOU AND I AND EVERYBODY GREW UP WITH IN THE ‘70S AND ‘80S WERE NOT PLAYING IT SAFE.”

- Joe Lynch

we used is that there's always that doting wife at home, and to be able to take someone like Johnathon Schaech and put him into that situation — it was one of many different subversive choices we made, very deliberately."

Lest one think *Suitable Flesh* is all about the sex, rest assured that the movie takes a number of seriously gory turns along the way, courtesy of makeup FX artist Greg McDougall (*Stranger Things*). Not wanting to give away too many specifics, Lewis recalls, "I did have to have my head cast done. It was my second one, and Barbara was there and really the only reason I got through it."

"I was there to hold your hand," Crampton smiles. "But it's scary; I've done it before."

"You can't hear anything, you can't see anything, you're breathing through these little holes," Lewis continues. "But Barbara was a godsend. And part of what was incredible about this project was that I'd be covered in prosthetics and blood, crawling around on the floor, and in that moment, I was still going, 'Man, I love my job!' [*laughs*] And to be so passionate about what you're doing that something that should be uncomfortable and miserable is actually fulfilling is so great."

The most memorable act of violence in *Suitable Flesh*, one that brought down the house at both Tribeca and Fantasia… again, it won't be described here in detail, but suffice it to say that a car's rear-view camera is involved. According to Lynch, that scene had its origins 16 years ago, "when I succumbed to the California lifestyle and bought myself a Prius. It had a backup camera in it, and I remember seeing it for the first time and thinking of that scene. And since that moment, sitting in the dealership in 2007, I've been like, 'I've got to use that somewhere.' I actually tried to include it in another movie that didn't work out, so I thought, 'OK, putting it in my back pocket!' That's one of the beautiful things about how twisted we are as filmmakers, especially horror filmmakers: This might sound weird, but we're always coming up with really cool ways of killing people! There's just something aesthetically where you're like, 'You know what I'd love to do? I'd love to cut someone in half and have their entrails fall out and let it all play in one shot.' I'd wanted to do that for years, because I was an avid Fango reader, and I thought, 'That's a Fango moment!' And I did it in *Wrong Turn 2*."

DAVISON MEETS HIMSELF ON SET.

He was equally determined to serve fans of Gordon and his Lovecraftian cinema, dropping in Easter eggs to tie *Suitable Flesh* into the "Miskatonic-verse," specifically *Re-Animator*. These range from a very similar establishing shot of that horror-ridden university to a security guard (played by Hunter Womack) identified as "A. Mace Jr." — son of the guard from the 1985 favorite. "The original script didn't have as much of that," Lynch says, "but I wanted to infuse a lot of that into *Suitable Flesh*, so that there would be ties to the original film. It's just handshakes for those who know *Re-Animator*. If you don't recognize them, no harm, no foul. But for those who know them, it's like, 'Hey, we're in the same universe here.' We just wanted to tell a different story within that world." 💀

NOT GONNA LIE: ASA'S (JUDAH LEWIS) FLESH DOESN'T LOOK TERRIBLY SUITABLE TO US.

JEFFREY COMBS ON "THE THING ON THE DOORSTEP"

BY MICHAEL GINGOLD

In 2007, it was announced that Stuart Gordon would direct Dennis Paoli's adaptation of H.P. Lovecraft's "The Thing on the Doorstep" for producers including Robert Katz, with whom Gordon had previously teamed on *Stuck*. This version of the project, as noted in the accompanying article, followed Lovecraft's tale by having a male protagonist, Edward Derby. And the obvious choice to take that role would have been Jeffrey Combs, who toplined Gordon and Paoli's *Re-Animator*, *From Beyond*, and *Castle Freak*, right?

Not so fast. In August 2008, this writer interviewed Combs about his current and future projects, and the actor revealed that *Thing on the Doorstep* wouldn't be among them. "You know, Stuart approached me about that a while ago and wanted

me to read it, and quite honestly, I opted out," Combs said. "It has a lot of sex. It's kind of wall-to-wall, because the whole idea is that someone gets infected by having sex, and he's doing it with his wife, with his girlfriend … And I just said, 'Stuart, no, thank you,' because I know how it breaks down and how it is on set, and I didn't really want to be in that world."

Gordon, Paoli, and Combs' previous collaborations were certainly rife with carnal content — though for the most part, Combs himself didn't take part, and he didn't want to start with *Doorstep*. "Stuart was like, 'Yeah, I know, being in bed with beautiful women all day, it sounds tough,'" Combs laughed. "And I went, 'You know, Stuart, actually, it is. I'm married, and I don't wanna do that.' It's not part of my world. It was just too much; it was like, 'And then they're writhing, and then they're humping some more, and then they build to a climax, and then they climax, and sweat…' and I said, 'No, no, no, no…' I wish him all the best with that one, but not every project's right for me." 💀

PREVIOUSLY ON...

FANGORIA PRESENTS

Elijah Wood

Issa Lopez

A Stephen King Podcast For Stephen King Obsessives

THE KINGCAST

Katie Siegel

Hosted by Scott Wampler and Eric Vespe

Proudly Hosted By The FANGORIA Podcast Network

Mick Garris

NEW EPISODES EVERY WEDNESDAY, WHEREVER PODCASTS CAN BE FOUND.

Rian Johnson

Guillermo del Toro

Stephen King

Bryan Fuller

Mike Flanagan

@Kingcast19

THEY LOVE THE '80s:

The Directors Of

V/H/S/85

By AMBER T

The horror anthology franchise serves up what could be its most anticipated entry yet.

With five sequels, two spin-offs, a passionate fanbase and even a Snapchat miniseries, the *V/H/S* franchise is one of modern horror's most enduring entries. Thanks to a diverse pool of talented directors, there's something across the *V/H/S* series for everyone. And *V/H/S/85* might just be the darkest, goopiest, goriest installment yet. Ahead of the horror anthology's October 6th Shudder release date, we sat down with all five of the directors.

DAVID BRUCKNER (WITH ACTOR JORDAN BELFI) CREATES MAYHEM IN HIS *INSIDE EDITION*-STYLE SEGMENT.

David Bruckner, wraparound segment "Total Copy"

I came up doing indie films on a shoestring budget that were held together by duct tape, bubble gum and a garage band vibe. That was my introduction to horror filmmaking. I've been very fortunate recently to do a studio movie [*Hellraiser*], and some bigger projects, and that's a larger machine, and it feels like steering an aircraft carrier. A different mode of thinking when you're managing an operation on something of that size. It can sometimes lose the spirit of those small productions, so part of why I came back to *V/H/S* was to be confronted with that set of challenges again and go back to something I haven't done in ten years. It was very fulfilling in that regard – we were able to follow our impulses and do what we want, and challenge ourselves in ways that you can when you're doing something small and bespoke.

Writer Evan Dickson came up with the idea as a response to rewatching *Videodrome* and *From Beyond*. It's a little Cronenberg, a little Stuart Gordon. I was talking about how the wraparound segments need to always be changing, and he took that and interpreted it through this subject, very literally, as a being that is constantly changing shape. I'm a bit of a technological alarmist. I think there are certain things developing that we should be afraid of. Any opportunity to make a classic, cautionary tale is something I would take up. In "Total Copy," we're talking about modern problems through an '85 lens – scientists that are doing something that is very obviously a bad idea but are continuing to do it anyway. I think sci-fi horror might be my favorite subgenre of horror and it's not something I've gotten to do very much. I think it's massively underserved and we don't get to see enough of it. It's an '80s vibe relic but it's also a warning of things to come.

I had the benefit of working with [concept artist] Keith Thompson again who designed our monster for *The Ritual* and helped us reimagine *Hellraiser*. He also worked with Chloe Okuno on *V/H/S/94* - with Raatma himself! Keith is incredible at taking design to the point of worldbuilding – his designs always have functions corresponding to the world in which they exist. They're also evocative of a body horror aesthetic that I'm endlessly fascinated by. And Rory was brought to life by Russell FX, who are incredible practical monster designers. They're down to do the hard stuff, like practical tentacles, that almost nobody does anymore. In a movie paying homage to 1985, we're kind of on the hook to do it practically, and that's a lot of rolling your sleeves up, getting involved and throwing blood around the room.

And what's Bruckner's favorite *V/H/S* segment from over the years?

Oh no, do I have to answer this? *[laughs]* I'm really bad with choosing favorites, but I think about Nacho Vigalondo's *Parallel Monsters* from *V/H/S: Viral*, a lot. I love the humor of it.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF SHUDDER

Mike P. Nelson, two-part segment "No Wake" and "Ambrosia":

I don't know if other horror filmmakers get their ideas like this but sometimes I'll just think of really macabre things while I'm randomly doing something, like 'oh man wouldn't that be crazy if you were pinned down in a boat in the middle of a lake and there was a sniper on the shore and there was nothing you could do?' I always imagine terrible situations in pretty mundane circumstances. I wanted to play on the vibe of late '70s, early '80s slashers – right away I wanted to lead the audience into something very different, subvert their expectations but still have a great payoff.

My dad had an old video camera like the one we use in the film. He took so many old home movies with that thing, and I still have stacks of the VHSs. I went back and watched them and paid attention to how he filmed things and what he zoomed in on. Myself and [*Wrong Turn* cinematographer] Nick Junkersfeld wanted it to feel like an old tape that you'd just come across, all the way down to like the mic fumbles and the really bassy hits when the telescoping mic would hit your arm, the zoom servo sound… we wanted all of that.

I do like my practical gore. I worked with the great Ryan Schaddelee and Beki Ingram of Outpost 13 Productions. I've known Ryan for many years, he designed and built all the skull masks for *Wrong Turn*. I told them I didn't want something cartoony, I wanted a realistic face getting shot off, with no CG. For that moment, they cast the head of Chelsey Grant, who played Kelly, and built a full fake jaw, with a flap of skin and teeth. We sprayed her face with blood and brains to hide the application, and we had Mikey, one of our stunt guys, stand way out in the lake with fishing line attached to the jaw. When I gave the cue, Mikey yanked as hard as he could, and the sack of fake blood, clear slime and chunks burst open. It looks like the bullet passes through and takes her jaw with it – all practical.

One of the things horror misses so often these days is that the less you know, the creepier it is. When you didn't fully understand the Michael Myers lore in the first *Halloween*, that's what made him such a formidable force, rather than how now he feels like a superhero killer. For me, the unanswered questions that linger are what the audience wants to put together themselves. When you leave the theater with all kinds of questions, the filmmaker has created a dialogue between audiences. When everything is spelled out for us, we have nothing to talk about except for the things we hated.

As for Nelson's *V/H/S* favorite(s)…

It's a close tie between Radio Silence's "10/31/98" [*V/H/S*] and Jason Eisener's "Slumber Party Alien Abduction" [*V/H/S/2*]. Oh damn, and I really like Johannes Roberts' "Suicide Bid," [*V/H/S/99*] too. That one made me really uncomfortable and that one felt the most *The Twilight Zone*, to me. I know that's three.

ROBIN (ANNA SUNDBERG) HELPS KELLY (CHELSEY GRANT) KEEP IT ("IT" BEING HER FACE) TOGETHER IN MIKE P. NELSON'S LAKE-SET SEGMENT.

Gigi Saul Guerrero, "Death God":

The moment I found out it was going to be called *V/H/S/85*, my best friend and producer Raynor Shima (one of the co-founders of Guerrero's Luchagore Productions) and I right away thought of the [Mexico City] earthquake of '85. We knew we wanted to explore that real, historic event but we gotta bring in that twist, so we started thinking about what else could have caused that earthquake, as well as bringing in the spirituality and folklore of the Mexican culture.

Since the '85 earthquake, Mexico has always done annual earthquake drills – every year, the same day on September 19. There have been other bad earthquakes on or around that date, and as a spiritual people we find that very weird. But Raynor – who's not Mexican – also became superstitious of what we were about to shoot. He felt weird about shooting on September 19, so he made the decision that we should push the shoot back by a week. September 19 comes, and everybody does the drill, no worries. But as we're coming back inside – earthquake.

PHOTO (TOP RIGHT) COURTESY OF DANIEL MADRID

REAL earthquake! A lot of our set got destroyed, so a lot of the cracks and mess you see are real.

In our culture, there's a passion to our gods – especially in the Aztec culture, they were the answer and the reason for living the next day. There was a lot of passionate sacrifice, begging for blessings and mercy, very violent times, and so vulnerable. Giving *everything* you are to something so powerful. Reading more into [the Aztec God of Death] Mictlān, I learned that he has so many layers that I wanted viewers to go and look into. And our costume designers, Alik Siranosian and Fabritzio Obregon, they had so much fun. They killed it! They went through four or five different looks that felt too modern, or too cool, or even too punk rock. They decided to go as authentic as possible – even thinking about the tools that the Indigenous people would've used back then. How would they have made an outfit? I want people to talk about Mictlān after this, and go search for him. We want Mictlān to be the Latino Raatma, yo! I can't wait for my mom to see it. She's gonna hate it! [*laughs*]

If Guerrero had to choose a *V/H/S* favorite...?

"Safe Haven," girl! "Safe Haven" by Gareth Evans and Timo Tjahjanto [*V/H/S/2*]. They win the trophy, the throne! How do you even get talent like that? They're the gods of found footage!

Natasha Kermani, "TKNOGD":

Although it was before I was born, 1985 is a year that's very exciting to me, specifically in the performance art space. When I was growing up, my mother was an active performance artist growing up in the scene with exciting artists like Laurie Anderson, Diane Mantzaris – and all of these artists were tech-heads. They were super interested in the intersection between technology, philosophy and morality. My mom advised me to check out the work of Jaron Lanier, who in the mid-'80s was developing VR tech. "TKNOGD"'s film within a film is directly based on Lanier, and the whole short was organically pulled from this

GIGI SAUL GUERRERO HONORS ONE OF THE GODS (JOSÉ MARÍA HIGAREDA).

A VR PERFORMANCE ART PIECE STOPS BEING BOTH VR AND PERFORMANCE (BUT IS IT STILL ART?) IN NATASHA KERMANI'S SEGMENT.

very real history of the artists who were on the cutting edge of technology.

It was very interesting to create a creature not from this environment. The world itself is obviously very inspired by *Tron* and *Johnny Mnemonic*, and the creature herself – I do see her as female – was inspired by sea creatures, those beings that come from a dark primordial soup, and the celestial, too. She has a crown, a regal, seraphim quality to her. We worked with VFX wizard Justin Martinez and producer Forrest McClain, who actually ran her through separate layers, running her through a VHS processor and then re-composited her back on to the original *Tron* world layer. We want her to be discombobulating – what time period is she from, is she from the future, is she ancient?

We worked with the brilliant Patrick McGee and everything is practical, the crowning jewel of the piece of course being the helmet reveal at the end. We built a torso of Chivonne Michelle from a lifecast. We loved the idea of the mask reveal, taking it off and seeing the gore underneath, which Patrick threw himself into, creating the brain and the wires. From there it was balancing the cyberpunk with the gore, like how *far* into her brain did we want the wires to be? Five or six puppeteers from Patrick's team were hidden under the stage to move her eye stalks and mouth and hands, because we wanted her to still be animated. We lifted her double up, flipped her over, got a little ambitious. That's a testament to the *V/H/S* ethos, we're always thinking what other craziness we can do.

Favorite segment?

I love so many. My favorite segment of all of them is probably Dave [Bruckner]'s, from the first film ["Amateur Night"]. Watching it now and knowing how scrappy they were and the ending is completely gonzo, total freedom. I think we're quite dominated by fear in our filmmaking now – am I ever gonna work again, is this idea too crazy, are people gonna get it? It's great to go back and revisit that childlike enthusiasm and excitement – what if we fly into the sky at the end with a fucking succubus? [*laughs*] That's very inspiring to me.

Scott Derrickson, "Dreamkill":

I wanted to expand what found footage can be, and be able to play with the format. I really liked working with the '80s cameras, and Brett Jutkiewicz (cinematographer, *The Black Phone*, *Scream* and *Ready or Not*) and I were really interested in actually using those old cameras and security cameras from 1985. That level of distortion is far more visually interesting to me than HD quality pictures. And of course, even though it's a film format, we did some things with Super 8. The restrictions are what's fun about it – Orson Welles very famously said that the absence of boundaries is the enemy of art. Lars Von Trier's *The Five Obstructions* is a wonderful example of film creativity where filmmakers are given absurd rules to follow and go away and make great films. A lot of the time, those constraints drive creativity, rather than limit it.

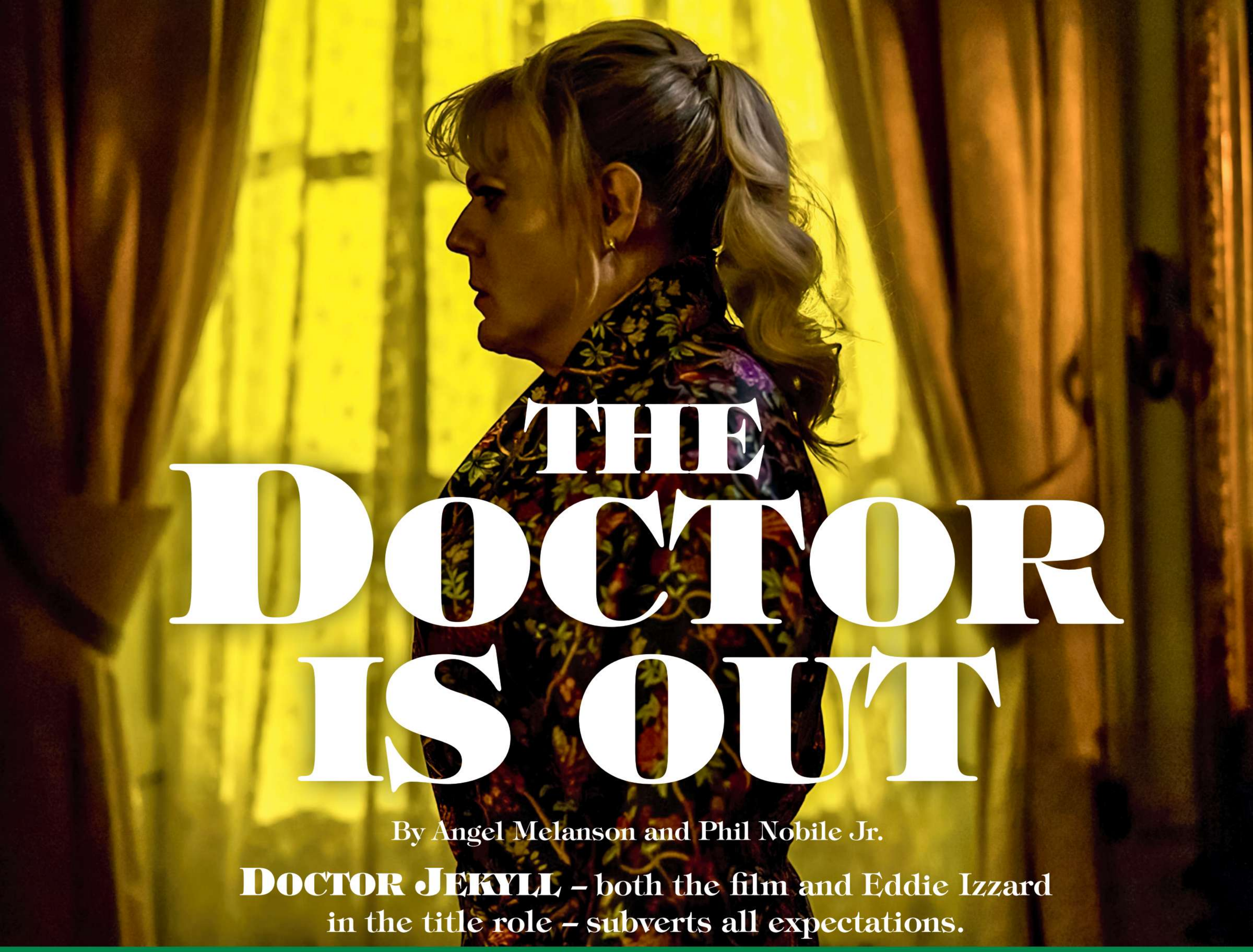
The mind-bending quality of the narrative is something I like to mess with as much as possible, and of course there's a little *The Black Phone* Easter egg in there for fans. But I think the thing about "Dreamkill" that's most uniquely me is that I made this film with my children. My son, Atticus, scored the movie and he's one of the most creative composers I've ever worked with. His work is outstanding. And my youngest, Dashiell, plays Gunther, the goth kid. They're both fantastic.

Derrickson's V/H/S fave?

Oh, easy! I've said on record many times that I think Gareth Evans and Timo Tjahjanto's "Safe Haven" from *V/H/S/2* is the best horror short film I've ever seen. One of my ambitions with "Dreamkill" was to try and make a better film than them [*laughs*]. 💀

These interviews have been edited for length and clarity.

SCOTT DERRICKSON OVERSEES A PARTICULARLY WET CRIME SCENE



THE DOCTOR IS OUT

By Angel Melanson and Phil Nobile Jr.

DOCTOR JEKYLL – both the film and Eddie Izzard in the title role – subverts all expectations.

Eddie Izzard wants us to know she's no expert on horror. But, as with every topic from the Ottoman Empire to World War II to *Star Wars*, she enjoys a good bit of analysis.

"I analyzed myself when I came out as trans. I sat on the bed, I closed the curtains and I did self-analysis. Why do I feel trans? Why do I feel at home expressing myself in a more feminine way? And that's why I'm now in this place, having had quite an interesting career, because I can analyze things."

The question was "why do you think horror is an effective tool to deliver themes and ideas?" We get there, eventually. "I think the horror genre gives the chance of more filmmakers to get in and get their mojo rising. And if it works as a horror film, the horror community, I think they will say, 'Yes, great.' If it works as a story first, if it scares them, then the ideas can sit behind it."

Izzard, one quickly learns, does not speak in soundbites. Every answer is an analysis, an exploration. It's not frustrating; rather, one sees the respect Izzard has for the written and spoken word, a commitment to never succumbing to anything less than a considered response.

"You're asking me this question, so here's me analyzing how fear works, and how maybe the horror audience reacts, and maybe how directors work," Izzard continues. "But I'm just looking at it from a slightly disembodied way, which is the best way to analyze, actually, to be outside of it looking in." If it was facile answers we were after, we'd have to look elsewhere.

So, too, is the case with Ms. Izzard's new film, *Doctor Jekyll*. The thriller from director Joe Stephenson, with a script by Dan Kelly-Mulhern and presented by Hammer, is anything but a retread, managing to turn a 137-year-old work into a legitimate mystery, using Robert Louis Stevenson's tale as a jumping-off point for a story that, at times, feels closer to Bill Condon's *Gods and Monsters* than a Victorian-era morality tale.

Fresh out of jail, Rob (Scott Chambers) needs an honest job on his record. His brother lines him up a caretaker gig, working for reclusive trans billionaire Nina Jekyll (Izzard), a controversial pharmaceutical CEO. Nina is charmed by Rob's earnest desperation, and an unlikely friendship forms. But as the past comes clawing after them both, Rob and Nina must work together to save themselves from the intentions and machinations of Hyde.

Izzard is no stranger to horror – her CV boasts *Shadow of the Vampire*, Bryan Fuller's *Hannibal*, and the rarely seen *Munsters* reboot *Mockingbird Lane*

– but neither is she a particular devotee of the genre.

"Horror scares the crap out of me. I love performing in horror, but I get very scared very easily. Some people lap it up. But I actually go to the reality of it, and the pants are scared off me by watching or reading horror."

Izzard cites an early experience with *The Amityville Horror* as particularly traumatizing. "When I was a teenager, I think I read the book and then I couldn't go to sleep. 'I'm not going to sleep now, this is just not going to happen.' So I think I had to stay up forever or something, for many hours until I just calmed down," Izzard confesses. "So I'm easier at performing in horror than inhaling horror."

That said, the subject of fear is one to which Izzard is well-versed. "Controlling fear has been part of my life. If you come out as trans and then you walk down the street, there's a lot of fear going on. Fear control is something that I am personally quite an expert in. I've been out for 38 years. You learn a few things."

"It was often difficult to tell if Nina was in control or if Rachel was in control. Not only does the audience not quite know, but even I, as Nina, don't know. And I kind of liked that." -Eddie Izzard

Which brings us to the elephant in the room regarding Izzard's casting. Upon the film's initial announcement, most fans (and journalists) assumed that Izzard was cast in service of a plot in which the Jekyll/Hyde narrative explored gender fluidity and identity.

MAKEUP DESIGNER FRANCES HOUNSOM TOUCHES UP DOCTOR JEKYLL HERSELF, EDDIE IZZARD.

The twist (well, one of the film's twists)? It *doesn't*. Nina Jekyll is presented in the film as a trans woman. Rachel Hyde is presented in the film as a trans woman. The transformation is closer to Spencer Tracy's subtle 1941 turn than, say, Ralph Bates and Martine Beswick's in *Doctor Jekyll and Sister Hyde*. The character's transness is clocked early on, and then ignored.

And Izzard wouldn't have it any other way.

"My character is trans, but that isn't the essence of what the story's about. That is the 21st century way. All this, 'Well, if you're trans, surely you've got to have some trans problems here.' No, it's *human* problems. There's a straight guy in this film; no one ever said, 'Oh my God, they'd better have some straight problems.' No one is going, 'Gosh, yeah, I found out I was straight, and then I had to go in and do some straight things, and now I got to kill myself.' We just don't talk about it, because it doesn't really matter. It's about two characters: one's Nina Jekyll and one's Rachel Hyde. And Rachel's very old, and very dark, and Rachel has no sexual identity, in a way," says Izzard, hinting at the film's other twist, one that's more along the lines of the recent *Daniel Isn't Real*.

Once viewers realize the film has set them up for misdirection – and invited them to interrogate themselves about

ROB (SCOTT CHAMBERS) IS CONFRONTED BY NINA JEKYLL… OR IS THAT RACHEL HYDE?

just why they felt misdirected – a bit of a mental reset is required, and it's that reset which *Doctor Jekyll* director Joe Stephenson is most passionate about. "I find it quite exciting that we are slowly but surely reaching a place in society where the gender and sexuality of an actor doesn't limit the stories they can tell, and the gender or sexuality of a character doesn't need to be the defining aspect of their personality. If *Doctor Jekyll* can help this happen faster in even the slightest of ways, I would be thrilled."

Without a reductive binary to divide the two performances, Izzard had no easy gimmick to manifest the two characters, who (for a while, at least) present as something closer to one character with a mood disorder than any sort of cliched "split personality." The approach intentionally confuses the audience as to who's who from scene to scene.

"If you go through the emotions of a character [as an actor], you can technically plot where your emotions should be, just to see where you are in the arc where the character is, because you're going to shoot out of sequence," Izzard explains. "But I actually found, within the scenes, that it was often difficult to tell if Nina was in control or if Rachel was in control. And I kind of liked that.

"So I don't think audiences will be able to see quite what's going on at first. Because I think internally, Nina – who has been taken over by this entity of Rachel – can't tell. And I wanted to go with that; not only does the audience not quite know, but even I, as Nina, don't know. I don't know who's running my mind almost from line to line, from scene to scene. And I think that helps, so that's what I tried to play."

It's another choice that will wrongfoot an audience who might think they know what they're getting into. But as Stephenson says, there's no reason to make the same Jekyll & Hyde story for the umpteenth time. "I loved the idea of taking a story so iconic and having the freedom to go where we wanted. There's such a wealth of adaptations that it freed us up to do something fresh, with a tone that felt our own."

That's not to say things don't go fully unhinged before the credits roll; a third-act turn from Izzard (which we won't spoil here) will send audiences out of screenings buzzing. "That was a tough shoot, and it goes operatic," Izzard says. "I was just channeling something else. It's a good place to go; you let go and something takes over and you're not quite sure what it is. Because everyone on set was going, 'What the fuck!?' And I was inside her going, 'What the fuck!?' And that's a place that I found intriguing, because anyone who's playing against that can't tell where I'm going to go next."

And where Izzard's character goes next is something you'll have to discover for yourself, when Hammer unleashes *Doctor Jekyll* into UK cinemas on October 27th. 💀

RACHEL HYDE IS OFTEN SEVERAL MOVES AHEAD OF THE OTHER CHARACTERS — AND THE AUDIENCE.

PHOTOS BY AMANDA SEARLE / COURTESY OF B GOOD PICTURE COMPANY LTD

BY VANNAH TAYLOR

SAW X

THROWS BACK TO THE BEGINNING

The filmmakers behind the latest entry in the long-running franchise discuss the return of the Jigsaw killer.

For years, it wasn't October for most horror fans without hitting the theater to see the latest *Saw* film. Throughout the last two decades, audiences were left shocked and awed by the gruesome traps of the franchise's infamous Jigsaw Killer, but after exploring various apprentices, admirers and copycats, *Saw X* turns back time and returns the franchise to its roots. Ahead of the film's theatrical release, we sat down with the team responsible for conjuring the most personal chapter in the story of John Kramer, including franchise veterans like director Kevin Greutert and producers Oren Koules and Mark Burg, as well as the new blood joining the creative team: cinematographer Nick Matthews and production designer Anthony Stabley.

Though the most recent films, 2017's *Jigsaw* and 2021's *Spiral: From the Book of Saw*, sought to expand the world of *Saw*, *Saw X* stays true to what fans love and strips the franchise down to what the filmmakers believe is the "lightning in a bottle about the whole *Saw* saga" – namely, John Kramer. Taking place between the events of *Saw* and *Saw II*, the film follows John Kramer as he travels to Mexico, seeking what could be the last chance to find a cure for his cancer. After realizing that he has been played by conmen, he moves from his most vulnerable to most vengeful hour.

"HE ISN'T LOOKING TO BE JIGSAW. HE IS A MAN WITH AN ILLNESS LOOKING FOR A CURE."

- OREN KOULES

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ALEXANDRO BOLAÑOS ESCAMILLA / LIONSGATE

A KILLER AND HIS MASCOT: JOHN KRAMER (TOBIN BELL) AND BILLY ARE BACK.

WE'RE NOT SURE WHAT THIS TRAP IS, BUT IT SEEMS LIKE DIEGO (JOSHUA OKAMOTO) IS NOT BEATING IT?

> "I WANTED US TO BE ABLE TO GET BACK TO THE GRIT, THE RUSTINESS, THE DIRTINESS, THE SCUZZINESS, THE KIND OF GRIME THAT MAKES YOU FEEL LIKE YOU NEED A TETANUS SHOT."
>
> - NICK MATTHEWS

But Kramer wasn't the only crucial ingredient in *X*'s return to form. Twisted Pictures' Koules and Burg were committed to bringing back Greutert (*Saw VI*, *Saw 3D*) as director.

"Kevin basically created our look as the editor of the first five. From the camera work to those flashback montages that ended every film – that was all him. It wasn't in the original script. It was Kevin," says Koules. With a team led by some of the minds that have been with *Saw* from the beginning, "the stars were aligning," Greutert says. Indeed, beloved actors Tobin Bell and Shawnee Smith agreed to reprise their iconic roles as Kramer and Amanda Young. "The confidence that all of us have in the film is sky high," says Greutert, "and I've never said that before about the films I've worked on."

This time, audiences will see John Kramer like never before in what Greutert is calling "the performance of [Bell's] lifetime." He adds, "John Kramer IS *Saw*," and while the director is hesitant on whether Jigsaw can truly be defined by our typical understanding of a "villain" or "anti-hero," he believes that "part of the magic is that Tobin Bell is always careful about the idea that John Kramer is not a killer." Rather, it's his artistic integrity that defines the character so well.

Koules takes that idea even further, stating that in *Saw X*, "He's the protagonist. He innocently ends up in this situation. This wasn't something he looked for. We are following his journey, a personal thing he was trying to do to better himself and ended up in a situation that he had zero control over… He isn't looking to be Jigsaw. He is a man with an illness looking for a cure."

It's a critical piece of the puzzle, that element of humanity, explaining why a character like Jigsaw has endured and captured the hearts of so many horror fans. The philosophical motivations behind Jigsaw allowed for a never-ending list of victims to be put to the test, but the evils that John Kramer has faced in his medical journey make for a major throughline, particularly in the films helmed by Greutert himself. Greutert confesses that it was never his intention to make a statement but that, especially in the new film, there is a "powerful notion that there are liars and conmen out there that continue to feel free to con and lie. This can be interpreted in a lot of different ways, and there will be a familiarity and relevance that will touch a lot of people when they see how it plays out."

Greutert recruited fresh talent to help complement the narrative with visual callbacks to the first three films. "*Saw X* is an homage to the other *Saw* movies," says production designer Anthony Stabley. "We looked at what we loved about them and made sure we included all those ingredients." Stabley, who has worked on films like *Stigmata* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, is new to the world of *Saw* and was tasked with the tall order of designing and testing John Kramer's arsenal of traps – an essential element in any *Saw* experience. Stabley sought to bring forth viewer empathy for John, even in his traps. "I'm really proud that the traps we put together are thematic, integrating the medical aspects of the film, and creating a connection between what you're seeing and what relation the people in the traps have with John. It all makes sense in a bizarre way… It's a really beautiful combination."

This combination is made possible by the gorgeous lighting and camerawork mastered by cinematographer Nick Matthews, whose work on the psychedelic

PRO TIP FROM VALENTINA (PAULETTE HERNANDEZ): IF YOU EVER HAVE TO RAZOR-WIRE OFF YOUR OWN LEG, DRESS FOR THE OCCASION.

MATEO (OCTAVIO HINOJOSA) HAS TO PERFORM BRAIN SURGERY ON HIMSELF. LUCKILY FOR A HIMBO LIKE HIM, IT'S A MINOR PROCEDURE.

THIS IS ONE OF THE MILDER TRAPS IN *SAW X*.

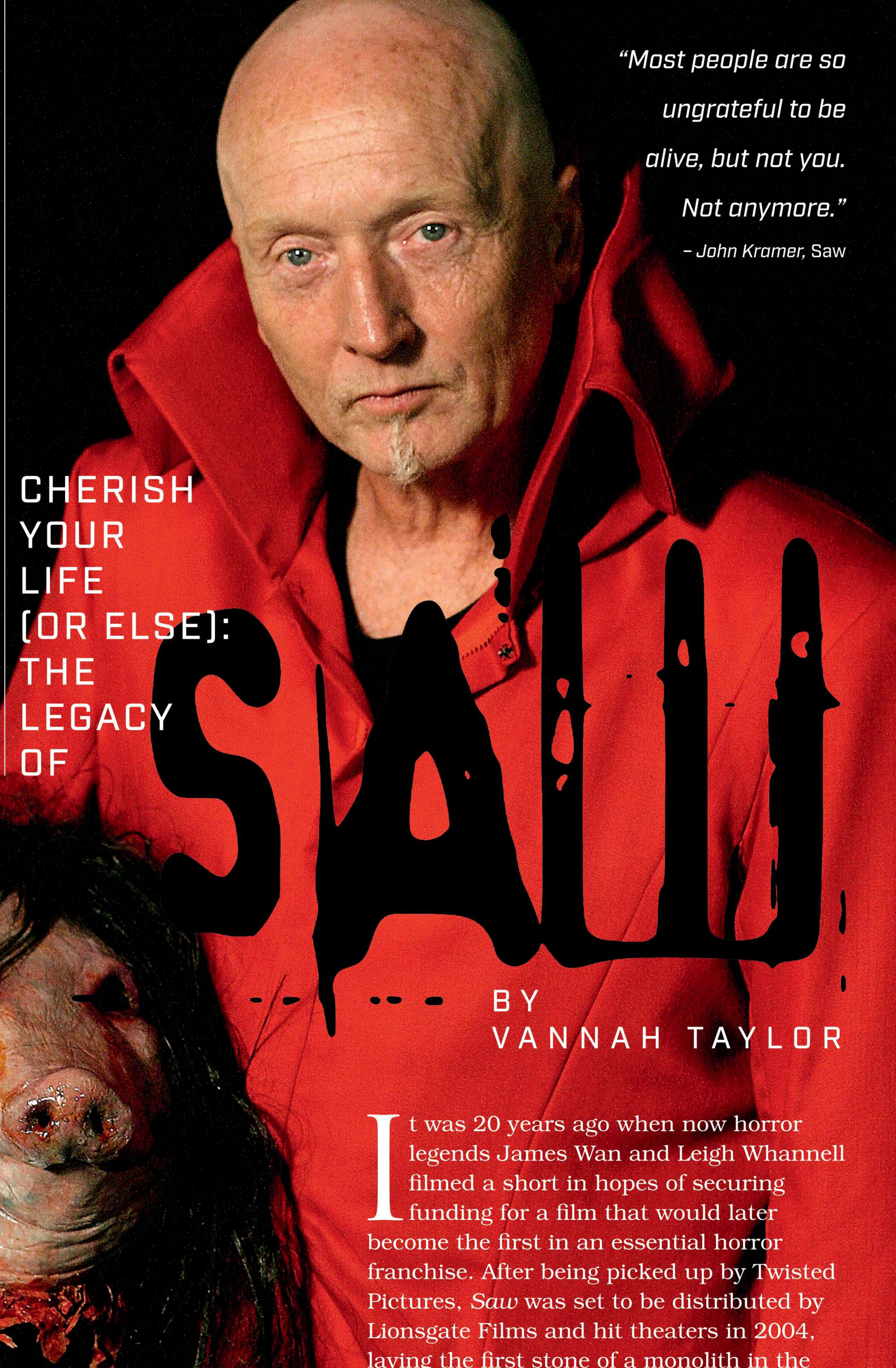
SURPRISE! SHAWNEE SMITH IS BACK AS AMANDA, COMPLETE WITH GOING-THROUGH-IT BANGS.

fever dream *Spoonful of Sugar* was released on Shudder earlier this year. Matthews is thrilled to join the iconic franchise in part because, "*Saw X* takes you into the emotional space of John Kramer. Tobin Bell is such a brilliant actor, and he's able to make you care and feel in all the ways that make you want to root for him. Not everyone can hold that sort of space where you have compassion for who he is as a character and where he's coming from. It allows you to access the sort of morality of this character."

Matthews discussed shared artistic inspirations with Greutert, mining from films by the likes of Tarkovsky and Kurosawa to deliver a new elegance to the *Saw* universe, while maintaining the giallo influence of films like *Deep Red*, which famously inspired the look for Jigsaw's puppet Billy. Matthews incorporates a similar color and composition from the first few films in this latest installment, and even though the film is shot digitally, the cinematographer worked hard to give the film a textural quality.

"As somebody who loves these sorts of films myself, I wanted us to be able to get back to the grit, the rustiness, the dirtiness, the scuzziness, the kind of grime that makes you feel like you need a tetanus shot," says Matthews. "But how do we take the audience from this place of beauty to a place of brutality? When talking about the color palettes of the earlier films, those movies tend to land in monochromatic greens or ochre yellows. I wanted to bring that kind of color separation into this movie, paying homage to *Saw I*, *II* and *III*. While *Spiral* and *Jigsaw* had gone for a widescreen look, we wanted to take this back to 1:8:5 for a taller image. When you see John Kramer, you get this landscape of the face. *Saw* films have such a unique and fun visual style, and we play with that."

All of these disparate elements confirm that *Saw X* is cheerfully embracing what fans loved about the original trilogy. And Koules confirms it: "We are very excited to be going back to our roots." 💀


"Most people are so ungrateful to be alive, but not you. Not anymore."
– John Kramer, Saw
CHERISH YOUR LIFE (OR ELSE): THE LEGACY OF
SAW

BY VANNAH TAYLOR

It was 20 years ago when now horror legends James Wan and Leigh Whannell filmed a short in hopes of securing funding for a film that would later become the first in an essential horror franchise. After being picked up by Twisted Pictures, *Saw* was set to be distributed by Lionsgate Films and hit theaters in 2004, laying the first stone of a monolith in the horror landscape.

JAMES WAN OVERSEES THE MAYHEM OF *SAW*; (BELOW) JOHN KRAMER, BACK WHEN HE WAS JUST GETTING STARTED.

JIGSAW'S TWISTED TAPES GIVE A VOICE TO THE COMPLEXITIES IN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF JUSTICE, GUILT, AND INNOCENCE.

Two men wake up in a dilapidated bathroom, dirtied, bloodied, and chained to exposed pipes. Most disconcertingly, they are unsure of how they got there. Suspicious tapes and clues scattered across their porcelain prison lead them to the realization that they are the latest subjects of a twisted game orchestrated by the notorious "Jigsaw Killer." This low-budget fright flick, often leaning more towards a crime procedural thriller, instantly captured the hearts of horror fans, and the *Saw* universe would see a new film hit the big screen every October for seven consecutive years. Ultimately *Saw* came to define a pivotal subgenre for horror, an era now known as "torture porn." This contentious and heavily debated label emerged in a now infamous 2006 *New York Magazine* article by David Edelstein. In "Now Playing at Your Local Multiplex: Torture Porn," Edelstein gives a charged reaction to an increasingly apparent trend in the release of exceptionally violent and sadistic films. Alongside the films of notable horror directors like Eli Roth and Rob Zombie, *Saw* is implicated in a judgment that these films seek to not only torture their casts of characters but the viewers themselves.

The films that would follow, if they managed to attract the "torture porn" label, would become associated with the idea that their sole purpose was to be as shocking, provocative, or titillating as possible – but any horror fan can tell you that these films cut much deeper. While Edelstein's article is seemingly a condemnation of the viciously violent movies that defined the public's understanding of the horror genre at the time, he unknowingly left hints to the appeal that these movies had by drawing a connection to the national debate on the morality of torture in the wake of the attack on the World Trade Center and the War on Terror. It is no secret that our personal realities and social landscapes shape our cultural touchstones. The horror genre has long been a time capsule for examining the fears of both the filmmakers and audiences of any given time. Filmmakers like Tom Savini and Wes Craven have famously cited the Vietnam War as a significant influence on their work, making it a critical factor in the analysis of '70s and '80s horror – a time not too dissimilar from the cultural climate of the early 2000s, allowing for a

connection to be drawn between these two eras plagued with a public outcry at violence on the big screen. In the early 2000s, history repeated itself and a new understanding of justice, revenge, and redemption was underway – and then came *Saw*.

Saw films are not simply slasher films. Jigsaw, the alias of John Kramer (Tobin Bell), is a horror "villain" that wears many hats – not just a notoriously backward-styled baseball cap in *Saw VI*. He is a decorated engineer, a philosopher concerned with justice and vindication, and most importantly he is simply a man suffering not only from terminal cancer but from the wounds left by medical malpractice, apathetic physicians, and predatory insurance agencies. These many facets of the Jigsaw Killer are what keep fans coming back to this franchise. It is the flesh that connects the trails of meticulously configured metal entrapments and winding labyrinths of redemption. Jigsaw's victims range from conmen and criminals that have escaped punishment to crooked cops, carnivorous credit lenders, and exploitative insurance executives – making his motivations deeply human and stemming from life experiences with which too many of us can unfortunately relate.

While the franchise is nowhere near short on iconography, from pig masks to tricycle-riding puppets, it is not a masked killer that stalks their victims through the streets, but the karmic weight of someone's past that lands them in chains with a tape in their pocket.

Sure, you could ask any *Saw* fan if they have a favorite set-up and you'd be met with enthusiastic exclamations like "Reverse bear trap!" or "Needle pit!" or "Shotgun carousel!" But it's not just the creativity behind these traps that has kept fans playing the game for the last two decades. Jigsaw's philosophy continues to resonate (no matter how muddled it might have become once various apprentices entered the playing field). This philosophy leads fans to not only find catharsis in the torment of John Kramer's deserving victims, but to ask themselves whether they might be worthy of the same judgment.

"Hell is other people."
– Garcin, *No Exit*

A man waking up in an unfamiliar room, unsure how he got there or for what reason and begging for an exit, is a synopsis recognizable as the opening scene in any number of *Saw* films. But for anyone familiar with existential philosophy, it also sounds suspiciously similar to the plot of the 1944 play *No Exit* by Jean-Paul Sartre. The story is as simple as that. Sartre's three characters are initiated into a journey of self-reflection that lands them at the conclusion that they are in a purgatory-like afterlife answering for their misdeeds in life. The presence of others in this hellscape causes each of the characters to act as mirrors, reflecting their flaws, not unlike Adam's damning photographs of Dr. Lawrence Gordon in *Saw*. Most importantly, *No Exit* builds towards the pivotal question: "Can one judge a life by a single action?"

Jigsaw's twisted tapes give a voice to the complexities in our understanding of justice, guilt, and innocence. Jigsaw's victims are tasked with conducting excavations of their past to unearth their guilt and to truly see the impact they've had on those previously invisible to them thanks to their own self-absorbance. When watching a *Saw* film, viewers must interrogate their understanding of blame and the meaning they assign to their own lives. Fans are asked to balance the scales of justice. To make a choice.

Because of these existential ruminations, *Saw* matters to many horror fans who go so far as to even call the films comfort watches – myself included. The horror genre can be a place of solace, employing grit and gore to explore the complications and contradictions of the human experience. While the *Saw* franchise is famous for finding some of the most imaginative ways to torture the mind and body, these films are not about death but about choosing life, about finding our humanity. Whenever a new film hits theaters, Jigsaw asks the viewer, asks *you*, to cherish your life.

Because you never know who might be pressing play on your tape.

THE OGS! CARY ELWES AND LEIGH WHANNELL BONDING ON THE SET OF THE ORIGINAL *SAW*.

AN EXCELLENT DAY FOR AN EXORCISM

WITH DAVID GORDON GREEN

FROM HADDONFIELD TO WASHINGTON, D.C., GREEN CONTINUES HIS JOURNEY INTO SOME OF HORROR'S MOST SACRED SPACES WITH

THE EXORCIST BELIEVER

BY RICHARD NEWBY

DIRECTOR DAVID GORDON GREEN SETS THE SCENE FOR YOUNG KATHERINE (OLIVIA O'NEILL), WHO LATER MUNCHES ON THE GOOD BOOK (BELOW).

David Gordon Green is no stranger to getting his hands bloody with allegedly untouchable horror properties, or dealing with the wide-ranging storm of opinions that take shape in the aftermath. After three *Halloween* films, he's ready to wrestle with the devil again. Green, alongside writers Danny McBride, Scott Teems, and Peter Sattler, is reteaming with Blumhouse for *The Exorcist: Believer*, a follow-up to William Friedkin's monumental film from 1973, and the first of a proposed trilogy.

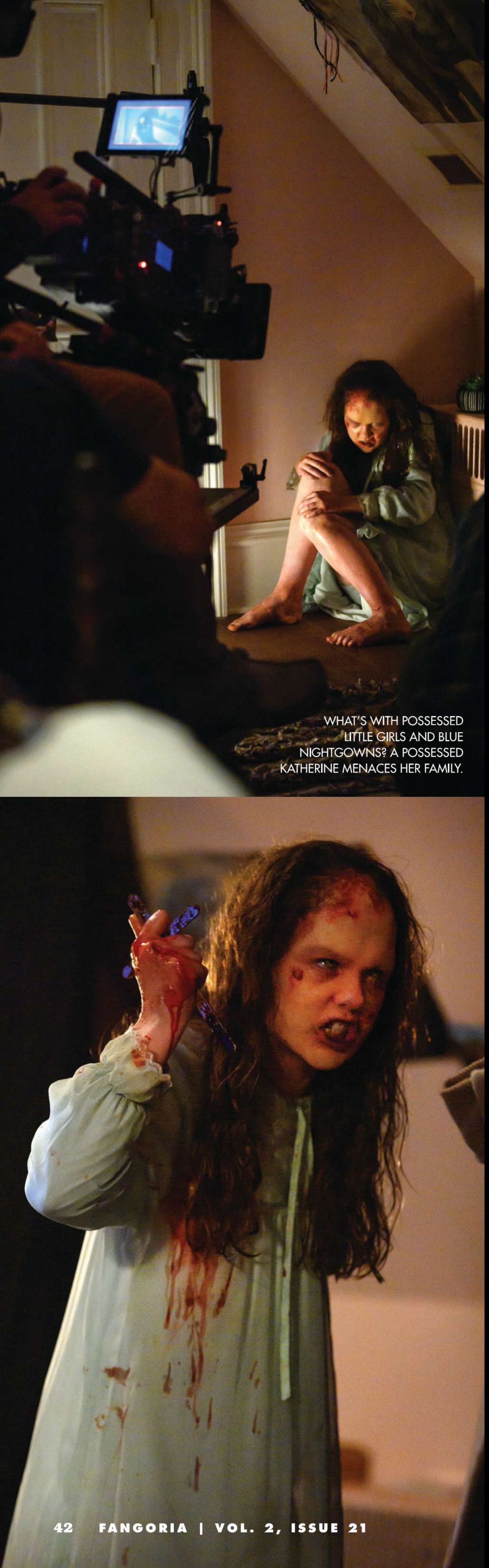
The Exorcist: Believer follows Victor Fielding (Leslie Odom, Jr.), who is confronted with evil after his daughter Angela (Lidya Jewett) and her friend, Katherine (Olivia O'Neill), disappear in the woods and return three days later with no memory of what happened to them. When the girls start exhibiting strange behavior, Victor turns to the only person who has encountered such malevolence before: Chris MacNeil (Ellen Burstyn).

FANGORIA spoke to Green about tackling another iconic horror franchise, working with a Hollywood icon, and how his regional background and filmmaking career informed the ultimate battle between faith and science, good and evil.

I don't know how much you hear it, but I love *Halloween Ends*. You've spoken a lot about how you've always switched things up over the course of your career. You never really repeat yourself, which is what made your *Halloween* films so appealing to me. I'm curious about what attracted you to doing *The Exorcist* as a trilogy after doing the *Halloween* trilogy. What makes *Believer* new and exciting for you?

My philosophy is never get in a rut, never define yourself as a brand, and always be changing, always be growing, always be mixing it up. When the opportunity for this title came up, my biggest fear was if I don't do it, they're going to get the other guy. It's a title that's really meaningful to me, as it is with a lot of people. It's a title that I'm skeptical of, that people made bold choices with, all of which I have a strange respect for.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL PICTURES / ANNE MARIE FOX



WHAT'S WITH POSSESSED LITTLE GIRLS AND BLUE NIGHTGOWNS? A POSSESSED KATHERINE MENACES HER FAMILY.

I do love the idea of working with known IP, of being able to live some of my childhood fantasies and horrors, and it gives me a creative place to go where I know I'm confident that there's going to be an appetite from an audience. For me to invest so fully in a production, and I've done a lot of indie movies that nobody saw, but at this point in my career I really want to invite an audience and play theatrically. I want to experience that kind of camaraderie that I have with a theatrical experience. The way to do this that appeals to me right now is to find the titles that are meaningful to me and meaningful to others, knowing they're going to be told, exploited, rebooted, or reinvented in some way.

Last year you said that you were taking a more academic approach with *The Exorcist* than you did with *Halloween*. What does that entail for you?

Well, if you look at the original *Exorcist*, it doesn't fall into any horror movie tropes, right? Michael Myers with a knife is a very obvious threat, but your ailing child acting in a way that feels inhuman is a more clinical kind of horror. That kind of unnerving horror, to me, was what separated this from anything I've done. The questions, the ambiguity, the wondering, the lack of control, the lack of answers. You can't install a security system for this. You can't call the cops. There's no violent aggressive action you can take to eliminate an entity or perceived entity from your child. I found exploring these parental handicaps fascinating. Our movie opens it up so that it's not just one family and it's not just a Catholic perspective, it's multiple families in an interdenominational kind of concept to, 'What are we supposed to do with this?'

Friedkin has said that he approached his film from a lens of not being a religious person. You've spent most of your life in the South, and Christianity is such a huge element there. With the subtitle *Believer*, I'm curious how you're approaching this film from that perspective. Is it aligned with your personal faith or does the film exist outside of that?

That's great because I grew up in Texas, going to church every Sunday. But my upbringing asked a lot of questions and led to a life of exploration and friendships of every imaginable religious perspective. That's the story I wanted to tell with this movie. This is not a story of: You open the Roman Catholic Bible and say, 'The power of Christ compels you,' and that's the fix. This movie is about the questions many face on their personal journeys of discovering their own spiritual identity, or lack thereof. To that point, yeah, it's personal. It's a lot of questions. My co-writer, Pete Sattler, and I both grew up churchgoing kids with devout parents. How do we ask questions respectfully of people that believe very… specific things? I almost said righteous, which leads us to *The Righteous Gemstones*, which is the comedy religious series that I work on. In that respect, we do the same thing where we're not undermining anyone's belief, but we are saying there are other things people believe that may not be what you believe, may not be what I believe, but there's an infinite universe of philosophy, theology, theses, and mythology. If I get to open up my chapter of the conversation, it's the fascination I've always had with, 'What if?' And, 'Why do you tell me this is true?' And 'What is your experience that led you to believe this?' All of these types of support systems and these spiritual mechanisms, I have a huge fascination for. This movie, and presumably this trilogy, will follow the fascination with these threads of spirituality.

“IN SIMILAR WAYS TO THE ORIGINAL FILM, THERE IS THE SCIENTIFIC CLINICAL EXPLORATION OF WHAT’S GOING ON AND THERE’S GOT TO BE AN ANSWER.”

Jumping off *The Righteous Gemstones* for a minute, I’m a big Danny McBride fan. I love your collaborations. I appreciate the elements of humor that were found in your *Halloween* trilogy. *The Exorcist* is not necessarily known for humor. I’m curious about how your history of humor plays into *The Exorcist,* if at all. Did doing *The Righteous Gemstones* give you a dual lens into approaching religion through humor and through horror that made it easier to separate the tones in similar subject matter?

Oh, horror and comedy, I think, do work along the same lines in a lot of the same setup and payoff type of fabric. I will say that there’s no intentional humor in *The Exorcist: Believer*. That being said, sometimes people want a tension breaker. Or, they’ll laugh at an eyebrow raise that never would’ve struck me as humorous. They’re looking for something to release.

I don’t ever want to say there’s no humor in it, but there’s certainly nothing crafted into the script. It’s not witty in that way, but I hope people can find levity in moments because I surely hope they can in their own lives.

Tell me a little bit about working with Ellen Burstyn. What was the process of pitching her this story?

It was amazing, and I never imagined we could get her there. She’s an icon and an actress that I’ve always loved. I had some ideas that we could use her, or we could not use her. It was just some long shot. We did the same thing with Jamie Lee on the *Halloween* movies. It’s like, you’re known for this iconic role. On one hand it’s something you’re really proud of, and on the other hand, you don’t want to fuck it up. I’d gone through that experience and I actually called Jamie and said, ‘I’m about to try this hunt again. What worked? How did I get you?’ She said, ‘The sincerity, the honesty, and the

PHOTOS COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL PICTURES / ANNE MARIE FOX

DIABLE À DEUX: KATHERINE AND ANGELA (LIDYA JEWETT) SHARE A DEMONIC HOST.

passion that you have.' I had these ideas on how to utilize Ellen, and then I read her biography, *Lessons in Becoming Myself*. I realized, without knowing much about her personal life, that what I'd integrated into my narrative was spot on for who she had become after the release of the film in terms of her own very profound religious explorations. When I read her book, I was like, 'Oh, I didn't make this stuff up,' and my co-writer and I had kind of conceived of something that really felt like it might connect with her. Maybe we do have a shot. We went to her and I sat down with her and kind of gave her the spiel and said, 'This is a role only you can play. The movie can exist without you, but wouldn't it be so much more meaningful if we could integrate this Chris MacNeil story into what we're trying to do?' I have to say, we just had a blast.

Last year you mentioned that you were a fan of all *The Exorcist* movies. I feel like a lot of the sequels and prequels get dismissed. For me, personally, I always cling to the fact that Martin Scorsese prefers Boorman's *Exorcist II* over the original.

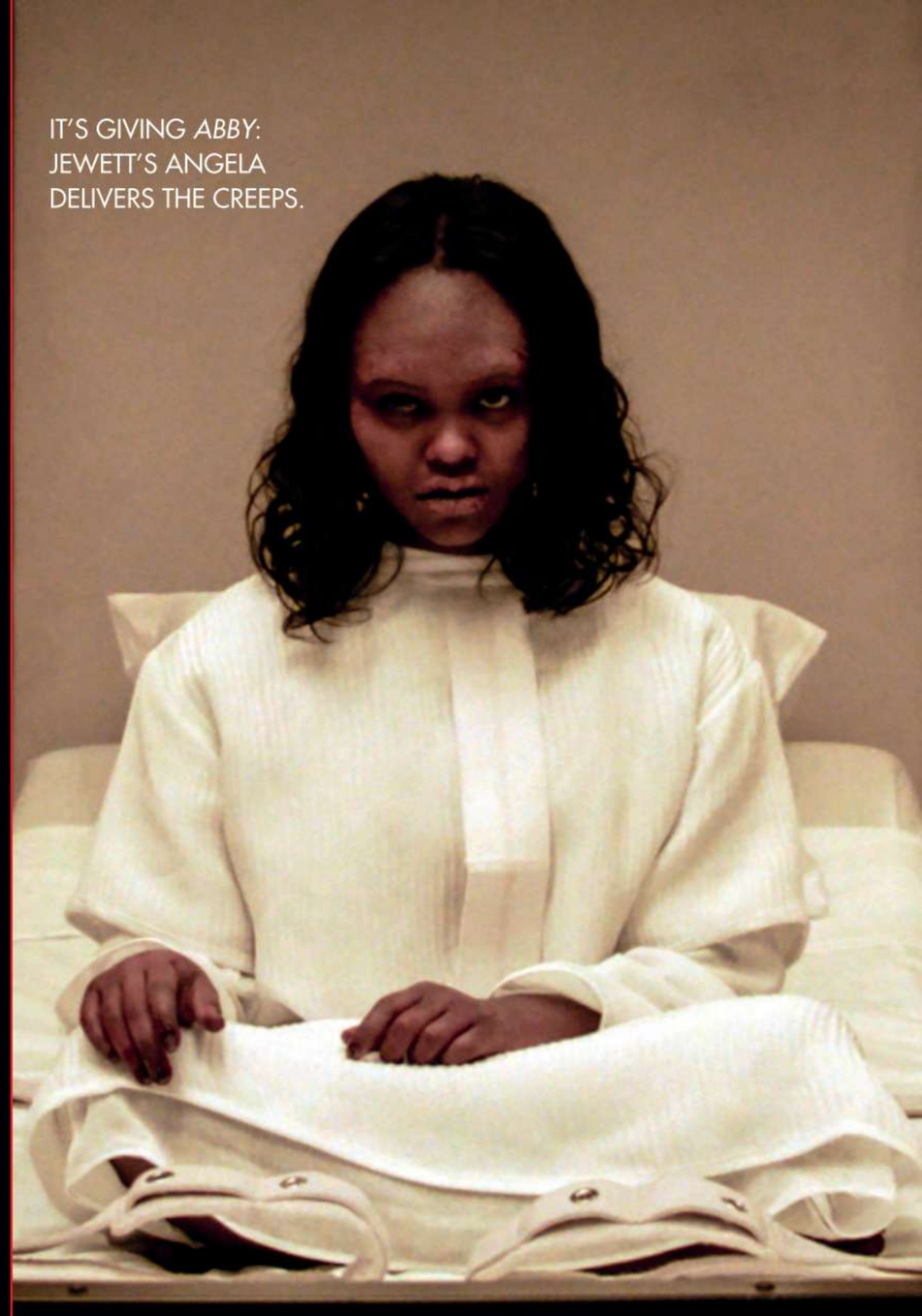
Really? I didn't know that.

GREEN READS THE ROOM.

Yeah, so whenever someone tries to dunk on my love of an unpopular movie, I always stand by that fact. I'm curious, what's appealing about those other *Exorcist* entries?

Well, I need to revisit them because I don't know them well. I knew all the *Halloween* movies well. What I do think is significant with these movies is that they're all bold swings. There's nobody saying, 'I'm just going to shyly make an *Exorcist* movie.' I mean, Boorman's is an outstanding, experimental movie on every radical level. It is. It just may not service your interest in the next chapter of *The Exorcist* movie. But boy, he takes you... That was not an easy movie to make, and none of them are. Ours as well. I think it's a challenging subject matter. They're technically challenging and nobody's sleepwalking through these movies. The thing I really respect about all *The Exorcist* movies is they're all gone for broke and they don't always win, but I respect somebody that's putting their ass on the line a little bit and not playing it safe. I am hopefully stepping into that theme a little bit.

Going back to William Peter Blatty and his book, *The Exorcist*, he said that he wanted to tell a story essentially about faith and science. Even going back to the original trailer for *The Exorcist*, it says something like, 'Somewhere between science and belief.' We've kind of talked about the religious aspects, but is there kind of a scientific mindset that you looked at this story through?



IT'S GIVING *ABBY*: JEWETT'S ANGELA DELIVERS THE CREEPS.

In similar ways to the original film, there is the scientific clinical exploration of what's going on and there's got to be an answer. We don't have that really vibrant spinal tap sequence, but what we do have is some significant medical exams and things that I think really show the invasive lengths that we'll go to to try to find an explanation that we can point to. Then the internal journey of these characters, many of these characters, is 'you tell me what works and I'll believe that. If I need to say the prayer and then that will work, fine.' They're looking for faith in something, and if it's not an institution, where is it out there? Is it in here? I guess that's where the title *Believer* comes from. Is it all a placebo? Is having faith enough of a self-help to get you where your insecurities and anxieties can be overcome because of a belief in something greater than you? Well, if so, that's a great recipe and I'll follow that. But the skepticism, the atheism, the agnostic confusion of all of us when we're faced with things we can't understand, that we can't explain, is to me the ultimate journey of this movie. 💀

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL PICTURES / ELI JOSHUA ADÉ

THE BODY & THE BLOOD

AN INTERVIEW WITH FX MAESTRO CHRIS NELSON

BY RICHARD NEWBY

When director David Gordon Green was tapped for *The Exorcist: Believer*, he knew there was only one man he wanted mixing up the pea soup: the special effects makeup designer behind all of Green's *Halloween* films.

After spending recent years terrorizing the residents of Haddonfield, and audiences, with the gruesome rampages of Michael Myers, makeup effects designer Chris Nelson is ready to stretch some limbs, twist some necks, and turn two teenage girls into monsters only the Devil himself could love. Nelson is an industry legend who's traveled to the spaceways of the Marvel Cinematic Universe and taken a stroll or three down Fear Street. Now he stands atop those iconic steps, reunited with director David Gordon Green, for *The Exorcist: Believer*.

FANGORIA spoke with Nelson after getting a sneak peek at some of his artistry in the film.

When you found out that David was doing *The Exorcist*, how long did it take for him to approach you?

I think it might have been during one of the *Halloween* films that we were doing. More than likely it was *Halloween Kills*. We were talking on the phone and he goes, 'Hey, Nelson, what do you think about doing *Exorcist*?' I'm like, 'What? What are you talking about?' And he said, 'Yeah, I'm going to do *Exorcist* and I really want you to do it.' And I was like, whoa. I was kind of blown away and taken aback because *Exorcist* is the holy grail of psychological thrillers and horror in cinema history.

I knew the 50th anniversary was coming up. I was at first going, 'I don't know, do I want to touch that?' Because I was such a huge fan of Dick Smith and he's such an inspiration to me and what I do for a living. My first thought was, 'Oh my God, do I want to go up against Dick Smith?' David said, 'Come on, man. We'll do some cool stuff and just look at it like an ultimate challenge.' I was like, 'Okay, yeah man, let's do it.' And so I was excited. I was excited to jump into it as a fan. Because that's what I always do, approach everything as a fan and do what I want to see.

This isn't your first go-round with *The Exorcist*; you also worked on *Dominion*, which has a very... storied production history. Did any of your work on that or experiences inform what you did on *Believer*?

No, not at all. None whatsoever. This movie is a direct sequel to the original '73, and none of those movies in our world, or in my world, mattered. As far as I'm concerned, they don't exist. And so we approached this with a fresh, new, and hopefully terrifying approach, just solely based on the source material, the '73 film. That was my only inspiration and our only inspiration for this movie.

The first time I saw The *Exorcist* as a teenager, I did not realize that Max von Sydow had old age makeup on, because I'd only seen him as an older actor. And it's just such flawless makeup that's done there.

> **"We approached this with a fresh, new, and hopefully terrifying approach, just solely based on the source material."**
> – Chris Nelson

ANGELA (LIDYA JEWETT) AND KATHERINE (OLIVIA O'NEILL, FACING) ARE PUT THROUGH THE WRINGER BY POSSESSION — AND CHRISTOPHER NELSON'S HANDIWORK.

I'm curious, do you have a favorite effect from the original *Exorcist*?

Oh, God, it's all so good. I'm a huge fan of that makeup on Max von Sydow. I was the same way when I was a kid and I saw it, I had no idea. I think that's probably got to be one of my favorite things in the film.

When I first watched it as a kid, of course the makeup effects stood out to me the most. Regan and her descent into what she looks like and all the craziness – the head spinning and the vomiting and the floating and all that stuff. After rewatching it over and over again and analyzing it over all these years, the meaning of it has changed so much for me. I started appreciating the story a lot more. I started appreciating

PHOTOS COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL PICTURES / CHRIS NELSON

the characters a lot more. I started appreciating how it was written, how it was shot, how it was acted. The psychological thriller part of it really started standing out to me. And all those things that you initially respond to fell by the wayside, even though it is a tour de force of makeup effects.

But I love the way that Linda Blair looks. Just her look in that film is so scary and effective. And it's fairly, dare I say, minimal. It's just how Dick Smith did it. What he chose to do really made it effective. And of course, that face, Linda Blair's face really made it. Without that face, I don't know if it would've been effective. And so that just goes to show you how much of a genius Dick Smith was and how he could manipulate that cute little girl's face.

I was reading some behind-the-scenes notes on the original film the other day, and Smith was talking about how, in terms of the makeup effects on Blair, he wanted it to look like there's a chance that, yes, she could be possessed by the devil, but also that this could be the result of self-harm and a gangrenous infection, which I thought was really interesting. Was there a balance that you were trying to strike between supernatural and scientific? I feel like that's such a core element of Friedkin's film.

Absolutely, it was a huge aspect of the design ethic. I approached it absolutely all-natural and for it to be plausible, we wanted the makeup to be realistic looking. We wanted them to be as if, like you said, it could have happened with self-harm. Do the girls have tics? Are they pulling on their hair? Are they biting their teeth or nails? Are they consistently scratching themselves? And we took all that into consideration of how that would affect someone's look if you were to turn it up to 10. We absolutely wanted it to be based in reality, not supernatural whatsoever. And I think we did a really good job of doing that.

There have been so many possession and exorcism films over the years. Did any of those inspire the look, or did you draw from some footage of the alleged 'actual cases?'

No, not really. I'm a big fan of all those movies. But no, they didn't really influence me here because again, we really wanted to live in the world that the original created. And it's easy to get influenced by some of the really cool things that people are doing now with these movies. But a lot of them go a bit too far into the supernatural, and we didn't want to do that. I really wanted

NELSON GETS O'NEILL'S UNHOLY SCARS JUST RIGHT, WHILE CONTACT LENS TECH AMANDA KELLEY ADJUSTS JEWETT'S EVIL EYE.

to stay grounded here. I think people are going to be surprised how much makeup is on the girls. There's a lot of subtleties and a natural, realistic look to it.

I think movies now sometimes go a little too far. The possessed people are suddenly doing parkour and they're wedged up in the doorframe and they're crawling across ceilings and all that kind of stuff. I'm unsure why, when you get possessed by a demon, you're suddenly super acrobatic [*laughs*]. To jump from the original to this, I think it's a logical lead.

When you're working with young actors, especially newcomers, and they're really thrown into all the makeup and everything, what is that process like for you? Are there certain challenges? How do you make them feel comfortable in the chair during this whole transformation?

That's a very good question. I was very concerned about that after having read the script and taking on the job. I realized very quickly that these girls [Lidya Jewett and Olivia O'Neill] were amazing. I don't think I've ever worked with an adult that's as professional as those two girls. They were so excited every single day to come into that trailer and to get into their makeup and sit. The most patient, both of them. Played a lot of Taylor Swift to put them at ease because it was their favorite artist [*laughs*].

And we just made sure that they were taken care of and making sure that they were comfortable, making sure they got breaks, making sure their moms were around, and the studio teachers were around. And we went to great lengths to make sure those girls were safe and making sure that they were comfortable and making sure that they had everything they needed and that we were having fun.

The other really challenging part to it was [that] we shot this over the course of a couple years. Time has gone by since we first life-cast these girls, and they change. They're wearing Invisalign to straighten their teeth out, and they're growing exponentially. And so we had to constantly recast their teeth and refit them and make sure their prosthetics still fit their growing faces. And we did a really good job of it, I think, myself and Vincent Van Dyke, who I built and designed the show

PHOTOS COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL PICTURES / CHRIS NELSON / ELI JOSHUA ADÉ

O'NEILL TURNS THE TABLES ON NELSON, BUT (BELOW) THE TWO EVENTUALLY CALL A TRUCE.

with at Vincent Van Dyke Effects. We just had to keep up with that and make sure that they were comfortable. You're wearing dentures for hours and hours and hours a day, that can grind on somebody. A lot of challenges but we did it. And we had a lot of fun. It could have been a nightmare. We got so lucky with those two girls. Again, I can't speak highly enough about them.

Something that I love about your work are the gags, as you call them. And in the original, there are some legendary ones – the head spin and the vomit. How much has the process for doing those evolved since '73? Are you using some of the same techniques, or has it been completely revolutionized and made easier over the decades?

Well, it's interesting. David loves practical effects and he loves to do as much as he possibly can on camera. And I'm the same way. We do, of course, utilize visual effects, and the marriage of the two, is when it works best. Obviously, we have tools and technology now that can make things a little easier, a little quicker based on a schedule. A lot of times doing things practically takes time and time isn't something that a lot of productions have these days. We did utilize some V effects, of course, but only to help clean up seams or augment things or take away things. But at the same time, I'm a big fan of old-school effects. I use them constantly.

Like you said, I tend to get these movies with lots of gags, and I like to go back to the Tom Savini way of doing it and the Dick Smith way of doing it and the Rob Bottin way of doing it. And that's how I learned. But yeah, we used a lot of really cool new ways of doing it. And also playing with camera tricks and sound effects. It's amazing what you can get done with just taking a practical effect, shooting it from five different angles with a good sound effect and good choreography. You'd be surprised what you can do with just good old-fashioned filmmaking.

What was the biggest difference on *Believer* compared to your previous work with David?

Halloween had a lot more blood and a lot more gags. I would say this is a makeup film. There's no guy in a mask walking around, slaughtering a bunch of people. This is a really scary psychological thriller. To compare doing a *Halloween* movie to this movie is night and day. It was a nice change. That's one of the reasons why I took it and wanted to do it, because I knew it was going to be a makeup tour de force, and I knew that it was going to be a completely different tone and a different vibe than doing a *Halloween* movie, which was something I needed after doing three *Halloween* movies back-to-back. 💀

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

EXHUMING GOD THROUGH THE EXORCIST FRANCHISE

BY RICHARD NEWBY

Faith. In some ways it's nothing. Nothing tangible, at least. Oh, there are books, cross necklaces, nazars, and dreamcatchers – symbols and idols to harness our faith and focus it like light through a prism. But really, faith is just an idea, only slightly more concrete in our minds than theory. And in some ways, that means faith is everything. It motivates us, moralizes us, and makes us keep our feet firmly planted on the ground, lest we go spiraling off into dark and unknown places. Faith in our fellow man, faith in our institutions, faith in our relationships, faith in our gods and demons, too. All of these things shape us and the choices we make. Dare I say, we have evolved as a species through our connection to faith.

When William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* first sent a jolt through audiences in 1973, it came seven years after *TIME* magazine posed an infamous question on its cover: *Is God Dead?* That question was allowed to stew for the Biblically significant number of seven trips around the sun before the adaptation of William Peter Blatty's novel unleashed hell across movie screens. The *TIME* cover story prodded humanity's need for God in the age of science by asking theologists, philosophers, scientists, and scholars where humanity stood in their relationship with the Almighty. While 97% of Americans at the time stated a belief in God, only 27% referred to themselves as deeply religious. It was concluded there was still plenty of curiosity about God, but agnosticism had taken hold, Biblical literalism had faltered, and social issues had led to an increase in ethical humanism as opposed to religious devoutness.

As for Hollywood's take on the matter, Polanski got there first. Rosemary Woodhouse picks up a copy of that very issue of *TIME* in the doctor's waiting room in *Rosemary's Baby* (1968). Nearly a year later, Polanski's pregnant wife Sharon Tate was murdered, alongside four others, by the Manson Family, led by Tex Watson, who entered the house on Cielo Drive with the words, "I'm the Devil, and I'm here to do the Devil's business." It is no surprise these senseless murders, coupled with rapid social shifts in America, the Vietnam War, and the end of the Golden Age of Hollywood, made the existence of a God seem less plausible. At the same time, Americans needed something to believe in, something to explain all the evil that seemed to possess us, something to give us faith that the good would come around again, too. That need, I'd argue, became tantamount to our continued survival as a species. Collectively, we needed an exorcism. And though Blatty and Friedkin certainly didn't approach their film with such lofty intentions, *The Exorcist* ushered in in a new franchise alongside a wave of religious-based horror. They exhumed God through our nightmares, and in doing so, drew the Devil out, too.

"Father, could you help an old altar boy?"
- *The Exorcist* (1973)

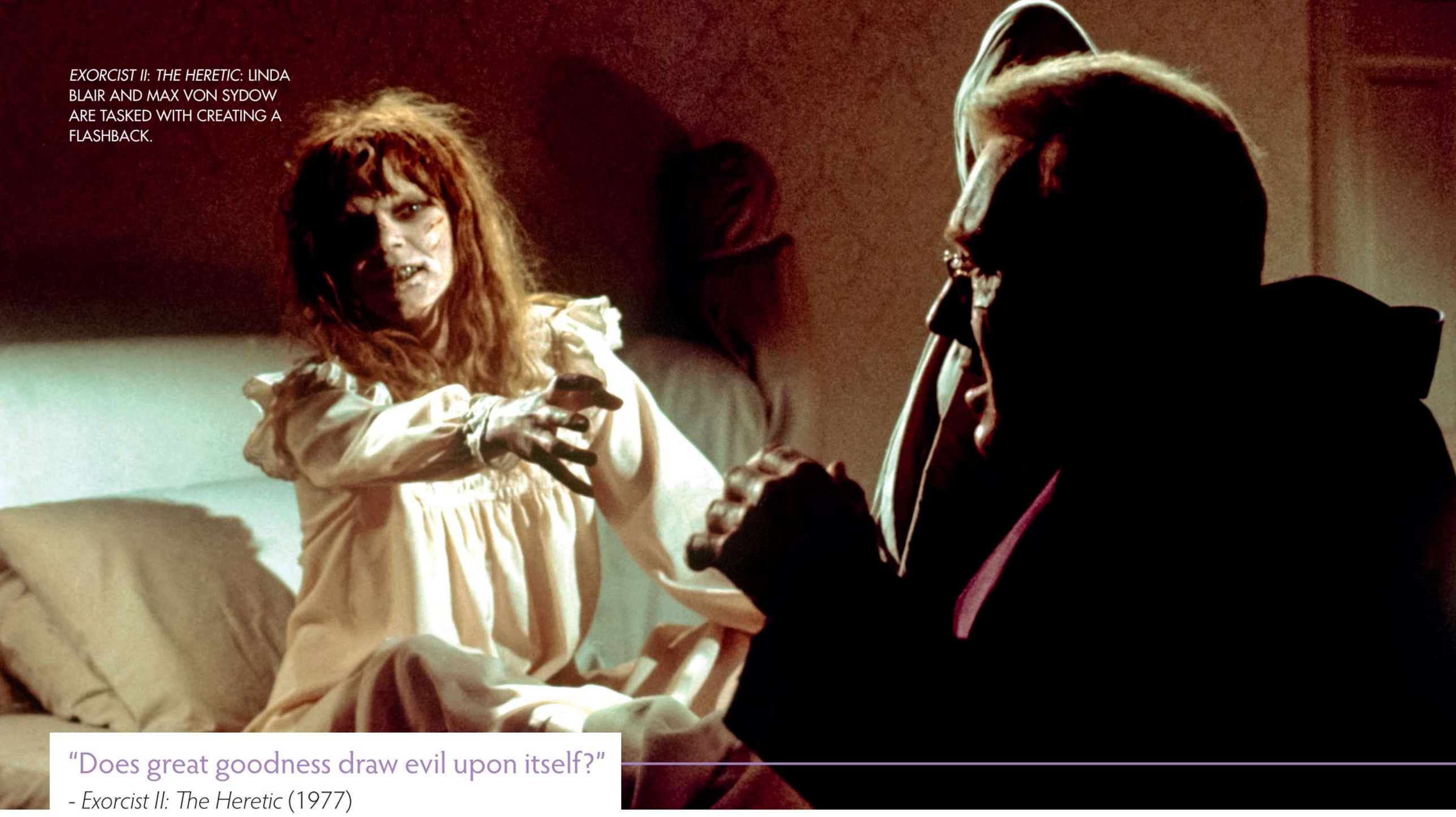
THE EXORCIST: WILLIAM FRIEDKIN LINES UP THE INFAMOUS CRUCIFIX SCENE WITH LINDA BLAIR.

Naturally, many of the conversations surrounding Friedkin's film turn to the possession of Regan MacNeil (Linda Blair), and her mother Chris' (Ellen Burstyn) desperate attempts to save her. Yet, it's Father Karras (Jason Miller) who is the film's most interesting character. Karras stands at an intersection, a literal crossroads between science and faith as a psychiatrist and a priest. His days spent listening to confessions of human suffering and mental unwellness he cannot solve with a few Hail Marys and the Lord's Prayer have resulted in an agnosticism that spreads over him like a sickness. As he tells the university president, "I need out. I'm unfit. I think I've lost my faith, Tom."

Karras becomes unmoored by his loss of faith, grappling with a kind of purposelessness that rests in the dark shadows beneath his eyes. There is a moment in the film, one that haunts Karras repeatedly throughout Blatty's novel, in which he encounters a vagrant at the subway station. "Father, could you help an old altar boy? I'm Cat'lick," the homeless man says. Karras turns away from him in disgust. It's not disgust at the man pleading for help, but in his inability to provide meaningful aid, and what's more, God's inability to provide aid despite this being one of his humble servants.

There is something to the film's expressed notion that small mercies cannot restore faith. There is nothing Father Karras could have provided the homeless man that would have eased his suffering in the long run or that would have made Karras feel useful. What was needed was a grand display of God's power and man's will, an exorcism. I think this was true for audiences as well, who needed a new kind of Biblical epic to reignite their faith. Audiences feared *The Exorcist*. We've all heard the stories of people fainting and vomiting. And while the film was condemned by some parents and religious organizations, isn't the fact that people felt fear from watching the film the biggest shift against agnosticism? Do we fear anything if there's not some part of us that truly believes it could exist, could happen?

When Karras asks Father Lankester Merrin (Max von Sydow) why the devil chose to possess this little girl, Merrin responds, "To make us despair. To see ourselves as… animal and ugly. To make us reject the possibility that God could ever love us." And what is Karras's confrontation with Regan if not a means to force him to confront the subway vagrant on a more Biblical scale? Karras regains his sense of purpose and faith through empathy and sacrifice, acts of love that allow us to shrug off the peeling skin of our animal selves. But does the restoration of faith come without broader consequences or…



EXORCIST II: THE HERETIC: LINDA BLAIR AND MAX VON SYDOW ARE TASKED WITH CREATING A FLASHBACK.

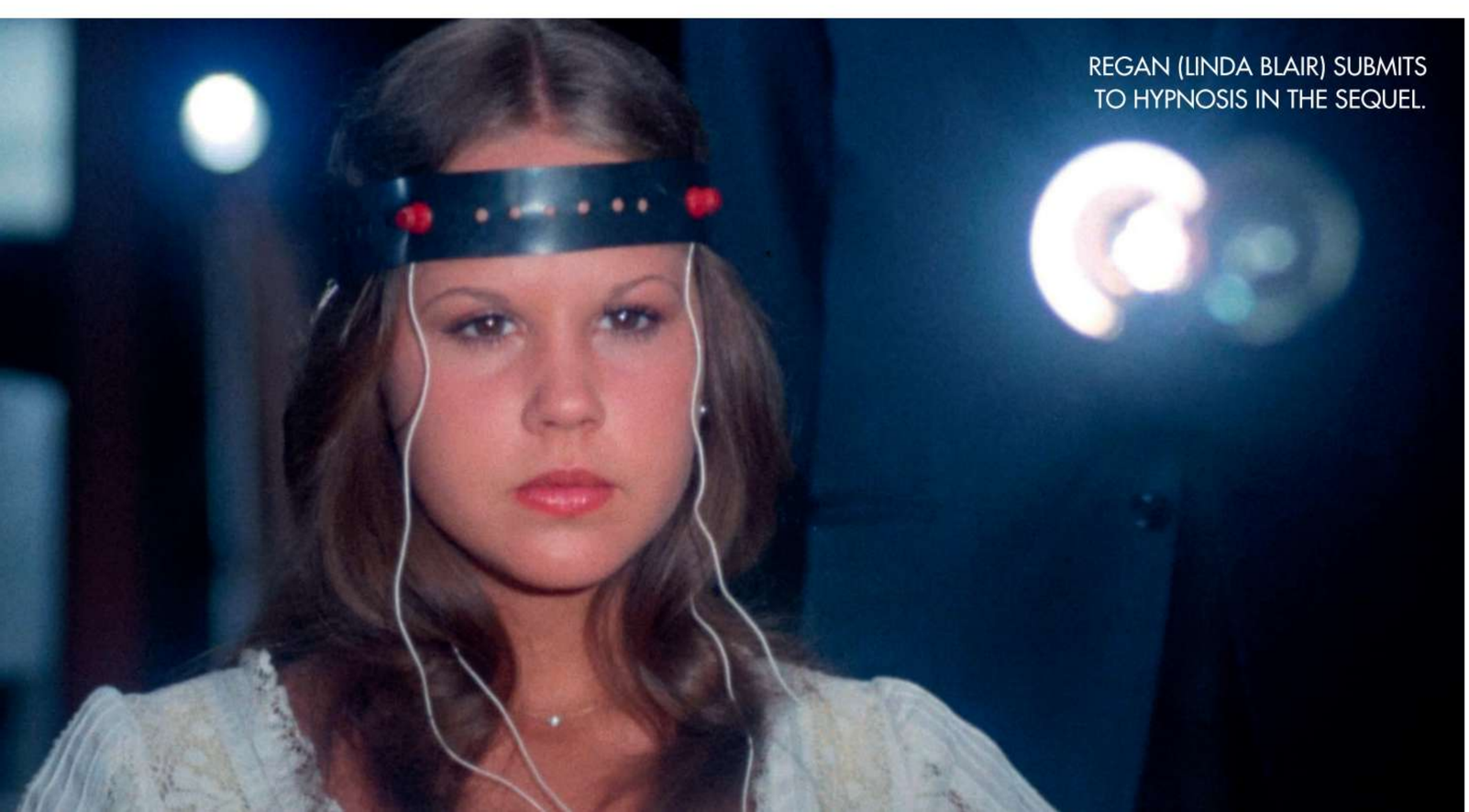
"Does great goodness draw evil upon itself?"
- *Exorcist II: The Heretic* (1977)

John Boorman's sequel to *The Exorcist* isn't interested in delivering what was expected from a sequel. Instead, it positions Regan as one of only a few individuals who are the catalyst for humanity's evolution, a new messiah. If *The Exorcist* reignited faith through fear, then *The Heretic* suggests the spread of faith, as an act of goodness, can be achieved not by fully rejecting our animal selves but by tapping into it, a primal grace to contend with primal evil. This acknowledgment of evolution came during a time when some American schools were just beginning to disavow the teaching of creationism in secondary schools. *The Heretic* attempts to explain the world's continued social unrest through a religious equation that combines theology and pseudoscience and ultimately defines evolution as not simply Darwinism but a conscious act of God.

Once again, we find a priest struggling with his faith. "Today, wherever I look, I see evil. God has fallen silent," Father Philip Lamont (Richard Burton) confesses. Tasked with investigating the death of Father Merrin, Lamont must dredge up Regan's repressed memories, along with the help of revolutionary psychiatrist Dr. Gene Tuskin (Louise Fletcher). His investigation leads him to discover the previous host of the demon Pazuzu, a young African boy named Kokumo (Joey Green), who as an adult (James Earl Jones) has dedicated his life to studying locust swarms.

Where the film comes into focus is through what Kokumo calls "the brushing of the wings," the concept that when one agitated locust brushes up against the wings of another, it becomes equally agitated, and the symptom spreads throughout the colony until you have a swarm. But there is a means to combat that, through a select few who can resist the brushing of the wings and calm the swarm. Kokumo is one such individual, and so is Regan. Boorman's film reframes Pazuzu's possession of Regan as an attempt to stop human evolution, to ensure humanity proceeds toward its self-centered destruction.

As the '80s approached, an era that would go on to be defined by unregulated capitalism, mass consumerism, and the "greed is good" mentality, *The Heretic* is strangely applicable in its call for individualism and a new way of hearing God amidst the onslaught of agitated voices seeking to devour anything in their path. In doing so, we can take part in a new communion, each becoming messianic representatives of the new world. *The Heretic* suggests the only way forward is to reach back through memory and our genetic development to tap into a purer, innately biological understanding of God as a force that bridges the gaps in our evolutionary history from animal to man and fills in...



REGAN (LINDA BLAIR) SUBMITS TO HYPNOSIS IN THE SEQUEL.

"All that space… just… space."

- The Ninth Configuration (1980)

William Peter Blatty's directorial debut, *The Ninth Configuration* (based on his novel), is loosely connected to *The Exorcist* through the character of Captain Bill Cutshaw (Scott Wilson), the astronaut Regan encountered at her mother's party before telling him, "You're gonna die up there." In *The Ninth Configuration*, Cutshaw suffers a mental breakdown and aborts his mission to the moon, screaming, "There's nothing up there! Nothing! Nothing!" If *The Exorcist* battled agnosticism by reviving belief, and *The Heretic* bridged our concerns of faith and evolution, then *The Ninth Configuration* is concerned with the horror of atheism.

Institutionalized alongside other veterans at an abandoned castle that serves as a mental asylum for the U.S. government, Cutshaw gains the attention of the new psychiatric head of the asylum, Colonel Hudson Kane (Stacy Keach). As a bond develops between the two men, they begin to have regular debates on the existence of God. Cutshaw believes no God could exist who would allow such suffering, attributing life to a cosmic joke. While Kane argues the existence of human life, proteins having formed in the ninth configuration – a near mathematical impossibility – suggests there must be a divine plan. He further argues that self-sacrifice, an act of pure human goodness, is evidence of a God because no human would choose to sacrifice themselves for another, without an ulterior motive, if not for some divine attribute within our genetic structure.

Cutshaw is possessed by atheism and what frightens him is the fact that even in the face of an absent God, evil still exists. Indeed, he has brushed wings with it. That little MacNeil girl told him he was going to die up there, and with no faith comes the realization there is nothing after death. No existence of consciousness, no passage of time, just an eternity of nothing. How could anyone exhibit the pure goodness of self-sacrifice when the reward on the other end is an absolute void? It is understandable why agitation and selfishness would take hold if all you have is the now, as opposed to the eternity faith offers. Maybe that's the ultimate version of hell. Maybe in the end, Pazuzu's ultimate means of corruption is doubt – there's no vision of a crucified Christ waiting on the moon to deliver salvation, only space. There's no little girl possessed by an ancient demon speaking in tongues; it's only English spoken in reverse. There is no God, only the Devil hiding in all that dark above us.

Yet Blatty contends there must be something more. Much like Lamont through Regan, Cutshaw's faith is restored by the unlocking of another's repressed memories: Kane, who is revealed to be a patient with a violent war history nicknamed "Killer Kane," who only believes himself to be a psychiatrist as a means to cope with his actions during the war. Kane's ultimate act of self-sacrifice following a clash with a violent biker gang (which might as well be this film's stand-in for a battle against Pazuzu or the Devil) is a means to restore Cutshaw's faith. But the sacrifice isn't enough on its own. It's the sacrifice, plus the ultimate act of empathy, of giving Cutshaw concrete evidence of an afterlife by leaving behind a St. Christopher's medal, that beats back the atheism that plagues him. *The Ninth Configuration* concludes with Cutshaw's triumphant affirmation that, yes, there is something out there. Cutshaw, like Karras, makes a Christ-like sacrifice to prove the existence of God. But why is it, except in Boorman's film, that such acts of restorative faith can only be achieved through the brutality of death? Well, it would seem that…

THE NINTH CONFIGURATION TAKES BIG SWINGS AND ASKS BIGGER QUESTIONS.

"The whole world is a homicide victim, Father."

- *The Exorcist III* (1990)

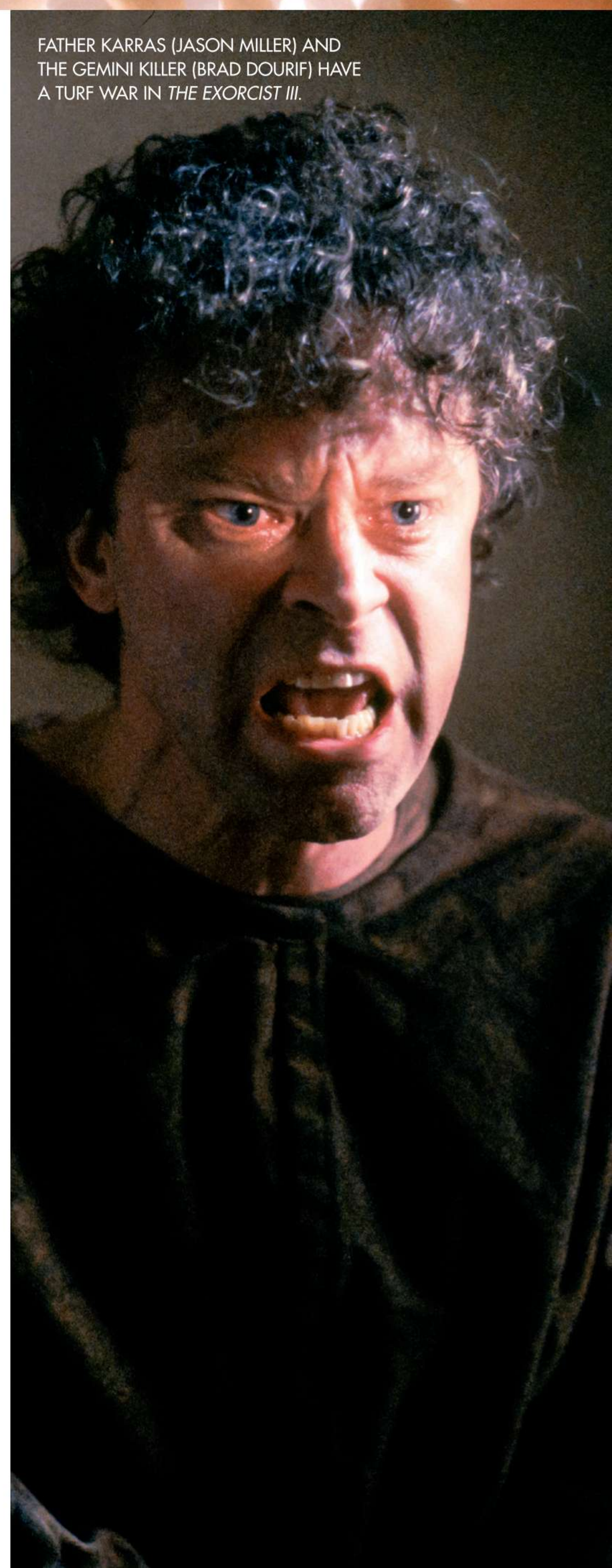
Blatty's second and final feature, based on his novel *Legion* (and the third in his faith trilogy), is his darkest one yet. It lacks the thematic depth of its predecessors, but the increase in violence and the focus on a cop, Lt. Kinderman (George C. Scott), as the lead suggests this is an intentional choice, allowing it to fall in line with the shift in media that took place in the late '80s and '90s. This was an era where violence and a fascination with law enforcement took over our screens and it was no longer church that gave us evidence of how the world operated, but the nightly news.

Kinderman, a supporting character in *The Exorcist* who harbors a love for Golden Age Hollywood movies, and previously portrayed by Lee J. Cobb, represents a significant shift from the priests and psychiatrists of the previous films. For one, he's Jewish, which means his relationship with faith is vastly different, and as such, *The Exorcist III* cannot rely on the same themes of self-sacrifice and messianic power as the previous films. Through the Jewish lens, Satan is not an independent force, but an obstacle of temptation. Here, it's not God Kinderman is searching for but the Devil. For Kinderman, the proof of such a force wouldn't necessarily infringe upon his faith but strengthen his ability to solve the mysteries of the here and now, rather than the afterlife.

Kinderman is drawn into an investigation of murders that are eerily similar to those of the Gemini Killer 15 years prior. The brutal murder of his hospitalized friend, Father Dyer (Ed Flanders), leads him to the discovery of the secluded Patient X (Brad Dourif), kept in the bowels of the hospital. Patient X is revealed to be the possessed Father Karras, his body inhabited by the Gemini Killer upon both men's deaths as an act of revenge by Pazuzu. Essentially, God and the Devil are sharing the same body. So, the question becomes not whether great goodness begets great evil, but if proof of God is only achievable through horror and death, what separates God from the Devil? Or are they two faces of the same entity – a Gemini?

Ultimately, Pazuzu is defeated not by an act of divine intervention but by a man with a handgun. In a violent world, the Devil can only be defeated by violence, and not the sacrifice of self but the sacrifice of another. "This I believe in... I believe in death. I believe in disease. I believe in injustice and inhumanity, torture and anger and hate... I believe in murder. I believe in pain. I believe in cruelty and infidelity. I believe in slime and stink and every crawling, putrid thing... every possible ugliness and corruption, you son of a bitch. I believe... in you!" Kinderman roars in the theatrical cut of Blatty's film, minutes before offering his final line, "My God." Is "My God" a separate utterance or merely the conclusion of his preceding lines, his confirmation that the Devil and God are the same? Or at the very least, indistinguishable by man in this age of public sin?

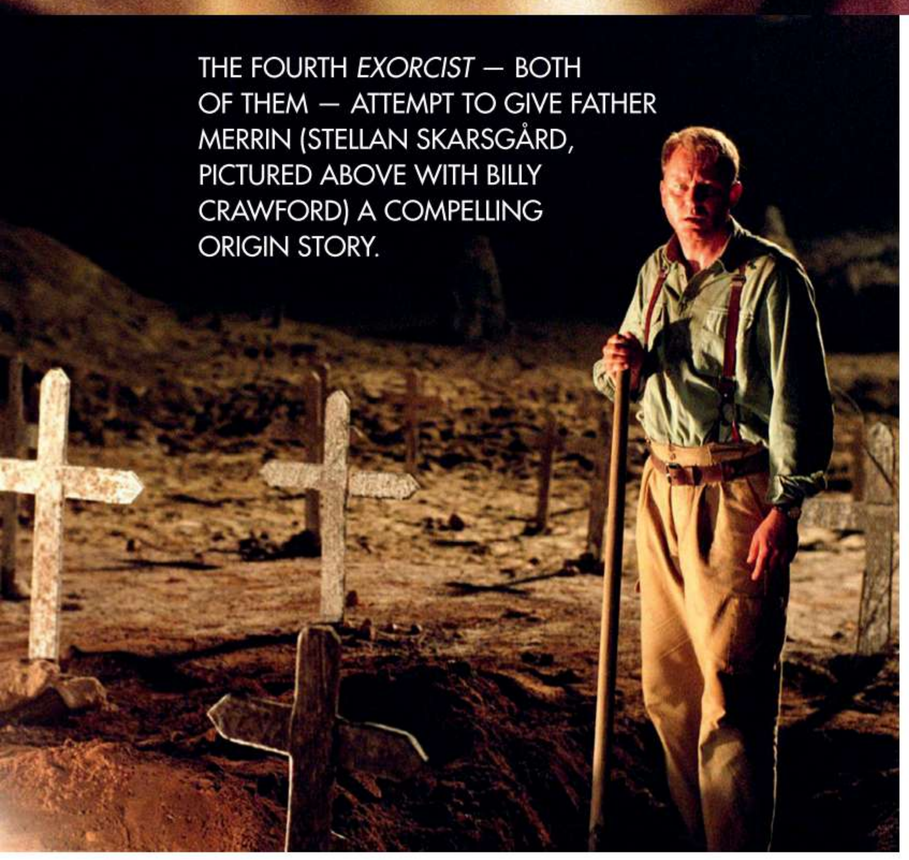
In the end, Kinderman shoots Patient X in the head, releasing Karras and defeating the Gemini Killer. We're left to wonder if that act was empathetic mercy or did Kinderman damn himself? As a Jew, no concept of Hell should exist for him. But does his final belief in Satan as an actual entity then permit a belief in Hell? Or does his lack of belief in Hell permit him to save Karras' soul? I'm not sure the film has an answer beyond offering up a two-sided problem, much like the Gemini itself, and Kinderman releases God and the Devil to places unknown. *The Exorcist III* posits the world is hell, though...



FATHER KARRAS (JASON MILLER) AND THE GEMINI KILLER (BRAD DOURIF) HAVE A TURF WAR IN *THE EXORCIST III*.

"Sometimes I think the best view of God is from hell."

- Dominion: Prequel to The Exorcist (2005)



THE FOURTH *EXORCIST* — BOTH OF THEM — ATTEMPT TO GIVE FATHER MERRIN (STELLAN SKARSGÅRD, PICTURED ABOVE WITH BILLY CRAWFORD) A COMPELLING ORIGIN STORY.

Paul Schrader's *Dominion* is the least essential of *The Exorcist* entries, infamously saddled by a second cut, *Exorcist: The Beginning*, from Renny Harlin, which attempted to make Schrader's film more Hollywood-friendly. Neither cut works on its own but both have their merits, with *Dominion* being the purer expression of the themes. Schrader, who has explored faith through most of his career, presents a young Lankester Merrin (Stellan Skarsgård) haunted by the role he was forced to play in arbitrary Nazi executions in his village several years earlier. Like so many of Schrader's men, Merrin is lost and tormented, having relinquished his belief in institutions as a result of the filth that chokes the world. He's a precursor to ideas Schrader would handle more succinctly through Reverend Ernst Toller (Ethan Hawke) in *First Reformed*.

While lacking the sense of urgency of its predecessors, *Dominion* is an *Exorcist* for the post-9/11 age, one reflecting an era in which it proved nearly impossible to have faith in each other and our institutions, let alone a God who would allow such an atrocity to take place. Not only that, but *Dominion*, set largely in the Turkana region of Africa, established a war between two considerations of God: an indigenous pre-Christian God, and the Christian God who only gained a foothold in the region through colonialism. This, of course, reflects the American invasion and occupation of the Middle East, and the anti-Muslim sentiment that spread across the U.S.

Dominion doesn't quite nail its ending, with Merrin regaining his faith through the exorcism of a young African boy, Cheche (Billy Crawford) feeling somewhat unearned. But it does suggest faith has an increasing value at our lowest moments and religious crusades are unnecessary expressions of faith when each religion can offer up its means of salvation and empathy. To truly evolve...

"It's going to take all of them"

- The Exorcist: Believer (2023)

It makes sense that the *Exorcist* franchise should be resurrected now, when America and much of the world often feel at their lowest point, and our understanding of faith (particularly among younger generations) feels less rooted in the idea of Christianity being the only way, or the right way. Despite our curiosity in faith, it seems we have plenty to fear, but very little to believe in. Like Karras, Lamont, Cutshaw, Kinderman, and Merrin, we're looking for some divine sign.

While there have been plenty of arguments, including those from Friedkin himself, that *The Exorcist* never should've spawned a franchise, it may be one of our most important horror series, a means to chart the functional purpose of our faith amidst the turning tides of history. And while our modern age may seem to have less use for gods and devils as a result of the atrocities that have occurred in their names, without becoming entrenched in any one religion or dogma, without allowing the idea of faith to become corrupted by persecution and intolerance, our survival depends on each of us, in our way, brushing wings, and becoming a believer. 💀

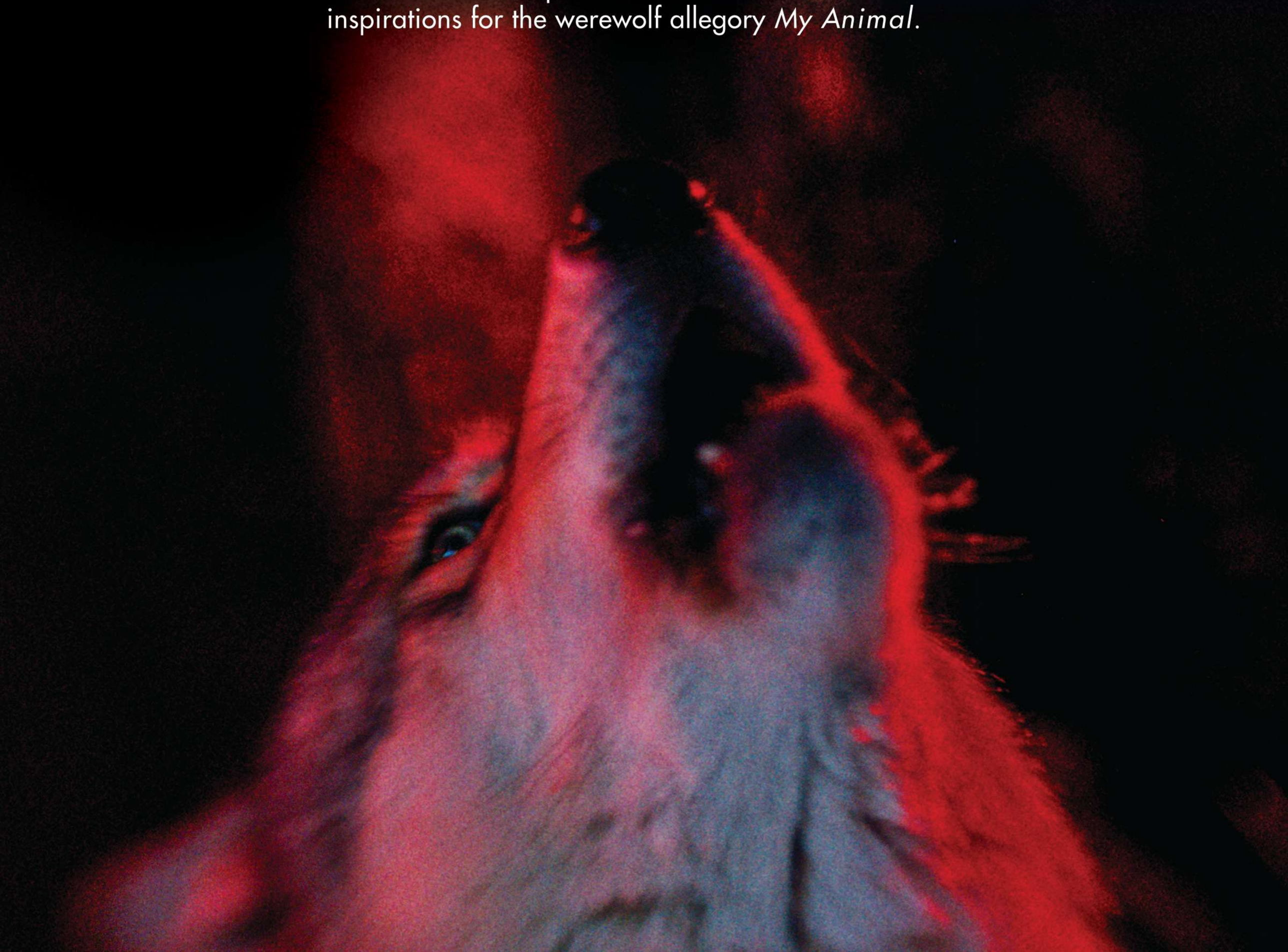
VICTOR (LESLIE ODOM JR.) AND DOCTOR BEEHIBE (OKWUI OKPOKWASILI) THROW EVERYTHING THEY HAVE AT THE EVIL OF *EXORCIST: BELIEVER*.

PHOTO (RIGHT BOTTOM) COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL PICTURES

MYTH, MAGIC, AND *My Animal*

BY LAURA MOSS

The filmmaker behind this year's *birth/rebirth* sniffs out director Jacqueline Castel's intentions and inspirations for the werewolf allegory *My Animal*.



Editor's note: Last issue, Jacqueline Castel interviewed Laura Moss about their powerful, modern-day Frankenstein tale, birth/rebirth. *Now the conversation continues (and the tables turn), as Moss delves into Castel's process and experience in bringing* My Animal *to theaters on September 8th, 2023.*

Laura Moss: In my film *birth/rebirth*, there's a strong Frankenstein inspiration, and you're drawing on the history of werewolf lore in history and cinema. You want to draw inspiration from great examples, and you want to avoid tropes at the same time. What was your thinking and preparation as you were going into that process?

Jacqueline Castel: I was taken by the writer, Jae Matthews', idea of using the werewolf metaphor in a different way, to surprise audiences by steering it in a different direction. I think the werewolf genre in particular has been too narrowly defined in cinema history – it instantly conjures a creature feature, most often anchored by a male protagonist. And when my producer sent me the script, I thought that I knew what it was going to be.

It was refreshing to me that the script was subverting some of those expectations and also taking a much more personal lens to the material, and using it as a way to explore intergenerational family trauma, what gets passed down through lineage, and how that impacts the way we feel about ourselves, and the struggle to love ourselves. That's one of the things I wanted to explore, especially during a time period in someone's life that's often very tumultuous, in your teenage years when you're trying to figure out who you are. I really connected with that aspect of it. And also, obviously, there's the queer metaphor, and the idea of exploring that aspect of your body, the physicality of that.

But in terms of prep, my references are diverse, from *The White Reindeer* (1952) to *Pumping Iron II: The Women* (1985) to Danielle Dax's character in *The Company of Wolves* (1984).

"I'm interested in the ways in which our mind functions differently when we're in heightened states of emotion, whether that be anger or desire."

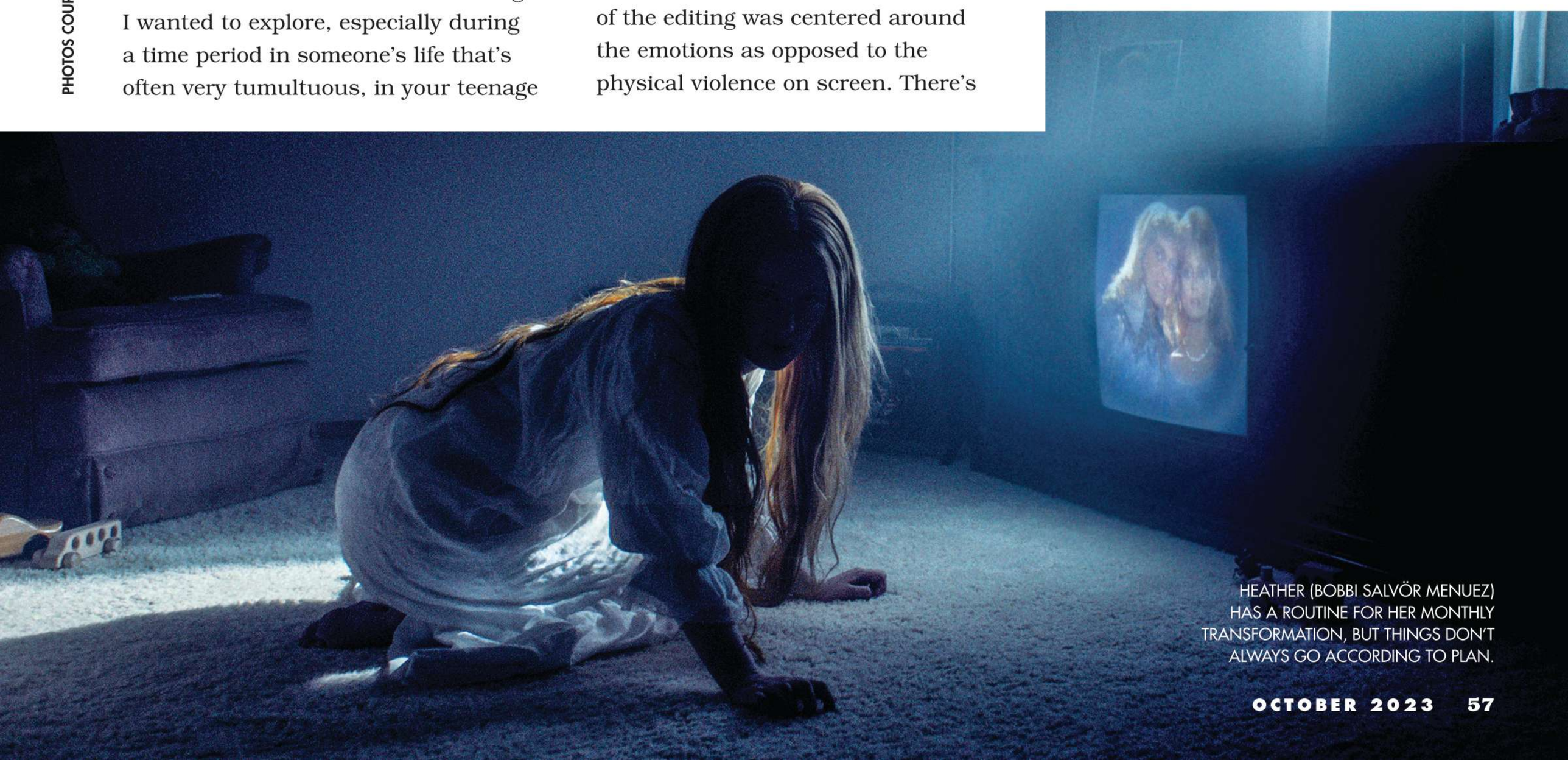
– Jacqueline Castel

I'm curious about the relationship to gore and violence, when you're thinking about those sequences in your film and about what to show and what not to show and the responsibility of violence on camera. What are your thoughts on that?

The most violent moment in *My Animal* is the end sequence. And you have to strike that balance where you don't want to glorify any of it, but you also have to let the discomfort sink in.

While my editor Marc Boucrot and I were working on that moment in the edit, I found myself very drawn to the character's faces, and so a lot of the editing was centered around the emotions as opposed to the physical violence on screen. There's a lot of cross cutting among the three characters in that scene – when Rick hits Heather, we cut to Jonny's face responding to the hit in a completely different location, as a visual metaphor for how he abuses her, too. That way, the women in the scene become physically linked in the violence they are both experiencing, and are responding to one another's pain. I thought was a really interesting way to approach the scene because that's where violence and hatred emanate, from within the human psyche.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF XYZ FILMS



HEATHER (BOBBI SALVÖR MENUEZ) HAS A ROUTINE FOR HER MONTHLY TRANSFORMATION, BUT THINGS DON'T ALWAYS GO ACCORDING TO PLAN.

You do such a great job of showing the nuanced, monstrous behavior of teenagers without us completely turning on the characters, which I think is really hard to do.

You also navigate sexual moments with a lot of sensitivity and empathy. I'm curious what your approach is when you're navigating those things with actors.

I'm interested in the ways in which our mind functions differently when we're in heightened states of emotion, whether that be anger or desire. Especially when you're younger, when your emotional systems flood and you see the world in a different way, and it's hard sometimes to even get out of it.

Those scenes were designed purposefully to be more stylized, because I wanted the audience to slip into that fantasy. I wanted to take it more stylistic, a little experimental, but completely emotionally driven.

The memory of what it meant to connect with someone when you were younger, or anytime that you're with somebody for the first time, there is a magic inherent in that. And I believe that filmmaking is a magical process – you have the ability to create any world you want. I love exploring that very psychological or emotional space. One of the things that I was also really excited about on *My Animal* was that, unbeknownst to me, my lead actors Bobbi [Salvör Menuez] and Amandla [Stenberg] were friends from the queer scene. The way the casting came together, I had no idea that they knew each other. I just wanted the two of them, and I feel really fortunate that on my first feature, my two top picks said yes.

So there was something that was really special about that, because not only were we able to have great conversations in advance of shooting those scenes, but there was just so much trust.

The intimate scenes were some of the material that I had the most fun shooting, so those were particularly joyful moments on the set and production. And Bobbi and Amandla were so committed to showing those types of love scenes on screen and to be able to offer that of themselves, because that's part of their own narrative, as well. I think that's important, to bake that into the DNA of the film. The way you build the whole world, it all has to be telling the same story.

How many days did you shoot?

We had 21 days for principal, and we had a couple of splinter unit shoots, including a trip to Alberta to work with

THE MORNING AFTER: HEATHER'S TRANSFORMATIONS LEAVE A MARK.

arguably the world's best wolf wrangler, Andrew Simpson. He was incredible; he had forty wolves on his property, and he cares deeply about his animals. We did a splinter unit on the Full Wolf Moon in January of 2022, in the midst of a snowstorm with a five-person skeleton crew. It was an extremely challenging shoot, so we had to cut a lot of stuff that I had storyboarded.

How do you ensure that your aesthetic gets preserved? Because it's such an aesthetically precise film, and I can't believe it was shot in 21 days. I feel like when you're shooting 21 days, you end up with television.

It was brutal. I was very particular about the DP that I was going to work with (Bryn McCashin). I was on the hunt for a DP with an organically similar style to my own. And somebody with the right attitude, somebody that I could trust. The camera work is important to me as a director. I'm very camera-focused because I have a background in cinematography. I think that helps to translate more on a technical level.

Another big part was being very specific about my location scouting, because I know that on small budgets, you have to rely heavily on your locations. I knew we weren't going to have a huge production design budget, and I wanted to protect the project from that. So that was part of the motivation for shooting in Timmins [Ontario], because when I saw the locations there, I thought, 'These are perfect.'

I want to go back to the idea of teenagers as monsters. You touched on it a little in terms of the emotional flooding of teenagers, but how do you think about preserving the vulnerability, and I don't want to say likability, but relatability of characters in the face of that kind of behavior?

Amandla and I talked a lot about Jonny's character, and we had a conversation early on where she relayed that she was in love with her best friend in high school, and she wasn't at a point in her life where she was ready to accept that part of herself, so she turned against her. Amandla's and my perspective on Jonny's character was, 'This is somebody who hasn't yet come to terms with herself, and this is the evil that can dwell within when you're not right with yourself.' Amandla did such an

(ABOVE) BEHIND THE SCENES OF *MY ANIMAL*; THE BEWITCHING JONNY (AMANDLA STENBERG) BATHED IN RED.

THE PHASES OF THE MOON SERVE AS A TICKING CLOCK IN *MY ANIMAL*, ONE OF WHICH HEATHER (BELOW) IS ALL TOO AWARE.

incredible performance, just really hit it perfectly because she was bonded to the material herself personally and understood the psychology behind it.

I wanted Jonny to still be relatable, because you can see that she's struggling really badly, too. She has this pain and weight that she's carrying around, and that translates to death and destruction. And even though she's actually connecting with somebody legitimately for the first time in her life, she is terrified of it. It's like the worst thing that could happen to her in a way. She's fighting that connection.

I saw that the mother [Heidi von Palleske] was in *Dead Ringers*, which is one of my favorite old Canadian classics.

I feel like no one picks up on that. I'm like, 'It's the triumphant return of Heidi von Palleske,' and no one's even mentioning it anywhere.

Your supporting casts, I think that's always a challenge, making sure that every character, every actor in the film is in the same film and is believable and compelling. Stephen McHattie is another wonderful seasoned actor in this film. He's known for performances that are very different to what we see in *My Animal*.

I love character actors, and I love villainous character actors. So I was going through the list of all the Canadian villainous character actors, because I love the idea of taking an actor like that and presenting a radically different role. I think there was one point, I found a Reddit thread with a bunch of people obsessing over Stephen McHattie's IMDb, and they were like, 'Wouldn't it be crazy if he played a caring dad in a movie?' And I was like, 'Yes!'

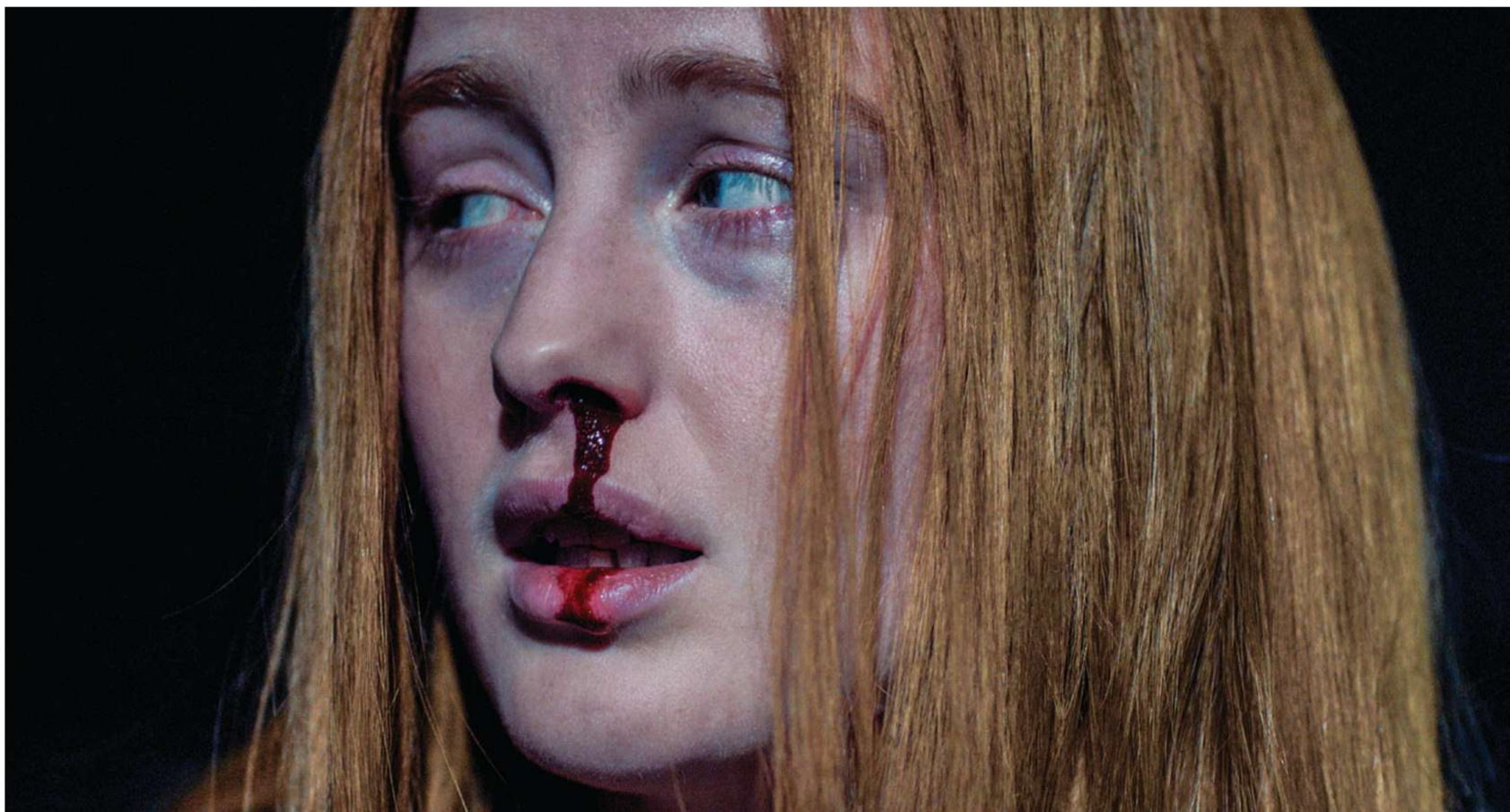
You've directed David Lynch [in *Curtains Up*], you've directed John Carpenter [in *The Puppet Man*]. Where do you sit as a horror fan? What is your relationship with horror in your own biography and history?

My obsession with films – all films, because I've been very voracious with the types of influences that I take in – stemmed from a very young age when I was struggling. Movies grounded me, and helped me process emotional states and navigate some of the more difficult moments in my life. I have a lot of love towards extreme cinema and towards horror films because it's something that I credit as saving my life when I was younger.

I think about that a lot in terms of what I'm trying to give back as a filmmaker, now that I'm in the position to be able to make films. *My Animal* feels like a film that I can give back to the younger version of myself. This is a film that I would've really loved when I was a kid and that I needed during that time period.

If I can provide that in some small way, that feels to me very full circle and meaningful in terms of what I'm trying to do. I think there is often a stigma of what a horror fan is. But I think that horror films in particular can help us process internal anxieties, as well as the anxieties that we have as a culture at large, in a really fantastical, stylistic and beautiful way.

This conversation was edited for length and clarity.



DELIVER US FROM SAINT DROGO

LIFE'S A BEACH AND THEN YOU DIE IN THIS FOLLOW-UP FROM THE MAKERS OF *DEATH DROP GORGEOUS*.

BY SEAN ABLEY

After a splashy 2020 debut with *Death Drop Gorgeous* (now streaming on Shudder), the filmmaking collective known as Monster Makeup slowed their roll – and upped their game – for their second feature, the bloodily contemplative *Saint Drogo*. While the all-queer company offered a candy-colored, drag-infused murderfest in an urban setting for their first film, their sophomore effort is a gory, folk horror-inspired slow boil set in the gay mini-Mecca of Provincetown, MA.

FX ARTIST JOE CASTRO FINESSES A CREATURE (DEVIN HUNT).

In the film, couple-on-the-rocks Caleb and Adrian (played by co-screenwriters/co-directors Brandon Perras and Michael J. Ahern) travel to the frozen beaches and deserted streets of the off-season tourist trap in search of Caleb's missing ex-boyfriend, Isaac (Tradd Sanderson). We're given a clue to Isaac's fate in the very first moments of the film, when we watch a shirtless young man happily disembowel himself, apparently at the behest of a hooded figure skulking about the beach. But was that the end of Isaac, or the beginning?

While the somber tone, methodical pace, and winter palate of *Saint Drogo* are worlds away from the high energy, Argento-esque *Death Drop Gorgeous*, the films are united in the one aesthetic that truly matters – ultraviolence. The latter will no doubt be remembered for the grisly "gloryhole grinder" scene; *Saint Drogo* ups the ante with not only disemboweling and dismemberment, but a disfigured mythical creature as well.

The company filmed during three successive, freezing cold Provincetown winters, with all the effects executed in the very last days of production. When they were finally ready to shoot the wet stuff, the boys of Monster Makeup wanted to keep the effects artist in the 'family.' "It feels important, especially given the climate we're in, to support and collaborate with other queer artists, actors, and crew," explains Ahern.

To that end, the six-man company, comprised of Ahern, Perras, Chris Dalpe, Wayne Gonsalves, Ryan Miller, (all taking on multiple filmmaking duties), and cameraman Kevin Bowden, reached out to openly gay effects artist Joe Castro (*Summer of Massacre*).

Real talk: a penis in a glory hole meat grinder is a tough act to follow, but Castro, who has offered particularly twisted visions in everything from his own *Terror Toons* Saturday morning cartoon carnage franchise to Bruce LaBruce's gay porn alien gorefest *L.A. Zombie*, specializes in gross and weird. "They told me that this was their baby, they were super proud of the film," says Castro. "They wanted to take it to the complete shock, 'ick' factor that they really, truly desired."

The opening disembowelment offered Castro the perfect opportunity to showcase both his practical and digital ick-making effects skills. "When [the character] cuts his stomach open at the beginning, I used practical blood on set, but then I digitally added the actual stomach opening... I try to do a little bit of movie magic in there while I use both techniques."

SAINT DROGO UPS THE ANTE WITH NOT ONLY DISEMBOWELING AND DISMEMBERMENT, BUT A DISFIGURED MYTHICAL CREATURE AS WELL.

CASTRO WALKS TRADD SANDERSON THROUGH A SELF-DISEMBOWELING (SEEN ABOVE).

And while the process would seem straightforward, winter on the Cape made it... less so. "We have this thin, bare chested man on set, like literally [experiencing] trauma. He was trembling so hard, and he had to pretend like he was enjoying it for the take. And then of course, I was putting cold blood and slime on him," recalls Castro with a laugh. The temperature wasn't the only problem — tempestuous weather necessitated a 25-minute relay between the beach set

CASTRO AND ACTOR/CO-WRITER/ CO-DIRECTOR BRANDON PERRAS BAT CLEANUP ON A BODY.

and production hotel. “I couldn't apply the makeup on the beach because there were storm gusts of sand that were literally gusting up off the ground into our eyes... And there was sleet and rain happening as well.”

Castro not only excels at coloring a set blood red, he’s also a talented creature designer. During their initial conversations, Perras pitched the idea of a “teratoma” as part of the film’s horror narrative. “I said, ‘What the hell's that?’ And [Perras] said, ‘Google it.’ And I did, and I was like, ‘Oh, my God...’” recalls Castro. “[He asked] ‘What can we do with that? How can we make it grotesque?’ And I was like, ‘How should we animate it?’” The teratoma, with some subtle added puppeteering, is revealed to be attached to another of Castro’s creations, a mysterious creature skulking about the town. That monster’s role in the film would be a spoiler, but suffice to say it fuels some sexy horror debauchery in a very unique way.

Aside from the gut-slashing and a hideous creature roaming freely among the pretty boys of P-town, there are other gory delights to be had throughout. In addition to a nasty mini-teratoma revealed at a particularly inconvenient moment during a gay rite of passage (spoiler: it’s a three-way) created by effects artist Scott C. Miller (also gay, also worked on *Death Drop Gorgeous* providing some choice death scenes), there’s some shocking body modifications as part of the sinister shenanigans infesting the town.

Without spoiling exactly *why* the prosthetic was required, Perras had to undergo the time-honored process of having a head cast made. “It was horrible,” laughs Perras. “I'm not a claustrophobic person at all, but he cast my tongue and teeth as well. So like, while I'm inside of this 20-pound thing on my head, it's also on my teeth and my tongue, and it just feels like you're seconds away from biting that off and choking on it.” Miller, who served as co-director and editor, (and just happens to be Perras’ real-life partner) watched the whole process go down. “It was even scary for me. I mean, not as scary as it probably was for him,” he recalls. “I would just grab his hand and be like, ‘Squeeze twice if you're okay,’ because I needed to make sure he wasn't freaking out in there, you know? But yeah, it was weird.”

Perras survived his ordeal, as did the cast and crew of the frigid, years-long shoot (unlike several of the film’s characters...).

As *Saint Drogo* rolls out into festivals and distribution deals, Monster Makeup plans its next moves as one of the more unique production companies in the world of indie horror filmmaking. The team operates in a framework of cooperative efforts, lateral management, and as an affinity group for queer horror filmmakers. And while they’re not so unique in their desire to create horror that is unsettling, horrifying, and gory, there’s something to be said for creating art among your people. “Given some of our themes... having folks that understand what we're trying to achieve because of similar lived experience also makes a huge difference in execution,” offers Ahern. “It was extra special being among people that understood me, like to the core, and were there to support me to do my very best,” concurs Castro when asked about the experience of working with an almost entirely LGBTQ cast and crew. “It was definitely a once in a lifetime moment that I had never experienced before. And for that, I'm truly grateful.” 💀

CASTRO AND HUNT IN A LIGHTER MOMENT ON SET.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MONSTER MAKEUP PRODUCTIONS / JOE CASTRO FX / STEVEN ESCOBAR

A FEW ANIMATRONIC NIGHTMARES AND A PIZZA PLACE:

FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S

By BJ Colangelo

Fantasy and fun come to life as the wildly popular horror video game finally heads to the big screen.

It all started with a negative review. In the early 2010s, Scott Cawthon was a video game developer cranking out faith-based entertainment, the video game versions of those uncanny direct-to-VHS animated features grandparents often purchase by mistake. Cawthon released *Chipper & Sons Lumber Co.* in 2013, where players controlled a humanoid beaver named Tyke to chop wood, build things, and help out their beaver dad, Chipper.

The game is... fine, but video game critic James Stephanie Sterling noted that the beavers resembled "a scary animatronic animal" and found the game to be "unintentionally terrifying." Her review was even titled "CHIPPER & SONS LUMBER CO. – I'll Swallow Your Soul!" which might be the only time someone's reviewed a Christian video game while referencing the Deadites from *Evil Dead*.

This crucial bit of criticism would become the groundwork for Cawthon's next project, a point-and-click survival horror game called *Five Nights at Freddy's*. Here, players take on the role of an overnight security guard at the dilapidated Freddy Fazbear's Pizza and try not to be jump-scared into a Game Over by possessed animatronics that make the Chuck E. Cheese crew look as innocent as a Squishmallow. But unlike *Resident Evil*, *Silent Hill* and their ilk, *Five Nights at Freddy's* core audience... was children.

Boosted by the popularity of YouTube Let's Players like 8-bit Ryan, Baz, Razzbowski, Dawko, CoryxKenshin, FusionZGamer, and Markiplier, the horror-starved youth denied the chance to be traumatized by video store VHS cover art and whose introduction to monsters were through viral tales of Creepypasta, went rabid. Freddy Fazbear was their Michael Myers or Jason Voorhees, and their passion turned an indie game into a cultural phenomenon. Since the first game's arrival in 2014, the *Five Nights at Freddy's* franchise has expanded to thirteen games, over thirty tie-in books, merchandise that rivals the heyday of KISS and, now, a long-awaited feature film.

Warner Bros. was the first to try their hand at a *Five Nights at Freddy's* (or *FNaF*) film back in 2015, but after a series of delays, the project went cold. The horror maestros at Blumhouse signed on in 2017 with prolific filmmaker Chris Columbus at the helm, but he left the project as well. It was starting to look like the *FNaF* movie was never going to happen, but a savior appeared in the form of co-writer/director Emma Tammi.

FOR EVERY ADULT GOREHOUND WHO WHINES ABOUT A PG-13 HORROR RELEASE, THERE ARE A GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE WALKING THROUGH THE GATEWAY TO HORROR CINEMA FOR THE FIRST TIME.

"It's rare to have the opportunity to make a movie that is really speaking to an audience that is so highly anticipating it," she tells FANGORIA, while admitting she needed to shut out some of that vocal fan pressure during production for her own sanity. "I think if I let that in too much, it would have felt a little distracting," she says. "Thinking about what had come [of the

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PATTI PERRET / UNIVERSAL PICTURES

MIKE (JOSH HUTCHERSON) IS ABOUT TO GET ANIMATRONIC'D, WHILE ABBY (PIPER RUBIO) FEARS FOR HER LIFE. I STILL DON'T SEE ANY PIZZA.

franchise] previous to my engagement didn't feel productive."

Instead, Tammi worked with a script approved by Cawthon himself and focused on figuring out how to deliver a seriously scary story within the parameters of a PG-13 rating. "It was a fine line in terms of wanting to bring in something that felt sophisticated enough for the adult fans and a general audience that skews older and also bring in the elements that the younger fans and a younger audience would really resonate with," Tammi says.

The script follows security guard Mike Schmidt, played by Josh Hutcherson, who takes on the night shift at the abandoned Freddy Fazbear's Pizza. One night, Mike brings along his younger sister Abby, played by 10-year-old Piper Rubio, and together the siblings discover that the pizza joint's animatronic mascots become a lot more active after midnight.

While the original *FNaF* game is simple in its plot and execution, the lore has expanded into some pretty gruesome territory. The menacing machines are only able to come to life and attack because they're haunted by the ghosts of children murdered and stuffed into the mascot suits by a serial killer, a shockingly bleak plot element for a series kept alive by fans who still have a bedtime. Admittedly, *FNaF* has some pretty convoluted lore, with even diehard fans disagreeing on the game's official timeline or status of character deaths. A cursory search on YouTube provides hours upon hours of fan theories, Easter egg hunts, and franchise analyses. Trying to make sense of the *FNaF* lore makes the *Halloween* series look like a cakewalk.

But a huge factor in the effectiveness *of FNaF* is in its

perspective, as the game forces players into the driver's seat of their own nightmarish experience. Adrenaline rushes while attempting to reserve the limited electricity that allows the closing doors to lock out the animatronics. Hands tremble clicking between security camera footage, knowing Freddy Fazbear will eventually be staring back at you. This exercise in tension is what made Let's Play videos so popular — it set a bar for fans playing at home. Can you last longer than Markiplier before getting scared?

Livestreaming a playthrough of *Five Nights at Freddy's* was a quick way for streamers to gain an audience, and soon became a viral challenge for college students and adults alike. It's undeniable that *FNaF*'s popularity has been fueled by the youth, but plenty of adults (this writer included) have an affinity for this new face of fear. Horror games that followed like *Emily Wants to Play*, *Bendy and the Ink Machine*, and *I'm On Observation Duty* all benefitted from *FNaF*'s obsessive fandom, as did the professional gamers and online personalities willing to monetize their fear for a live audience.

There's an intimate connection between the player and the horrific events in the *FNaF* games that simply can't be replicated outside of the gaming landscape, but as the popularity of the books has already proven, Freddy Fazbear and company are effectively scary regardless of medium. "The immersive quality of the game is so powerful and I wanted to approach it stylistically in a way that still did feel immersive at times, particularly through the eyes of our characters – which also just leans into strong storytelling in my opinion – but we were very aware that this was a different medium and that [the film] was going to have to stand on its own," Tammi tells us. And the easiest way to transcend the virtual world of the games was the ability to turn the CG ephialtes into hulking, tangible beings.

The legendary Jim Henson's Creature Shop was enlisted to bring the animatronics to the big screen, controlled by incredibly talented puppeteers that gave the monsters a life of their own. "The animatronics have a little bit of like an X factor, not unlike people, because they can improvise, too," says Tammi. "All of a sudden an eyeball will start going in a different direction or an arm will start to fritz out or do something that you didn't expect it to… and those are really fantastic magical moments because you get to have a new discovery or a unique take. I embraced all those imperfections."

Freddy Fazbear, Bonnie the bunny, Chica the chicken, and Foxy the fox are the demented denizens of the pizzeria, and their unsettling general appearance is scary enough on its own, even without the whole "souls of dead children" thing. With their deep-set eyes, extended jaw drops, inelegant movements, and unnaturally low eyelids, they look like something straight out of the uncanny valley. Even when the animatronics are completely still or joyfully playing music to entertain children, their existence taps into a primal fear many of us possess. Who is inside the costume? Who is in control of these machines? And can we trust them? Their presence sparks a similar distrust of mannequins, mascots, statues, and even dolls. "Sometimes I'd be talking to or standing next to one of them and talking to an actor or, you know, focusing on the animatronic, and they'd blink or do something that no one had controlled them to do," Tammi says. "And it felt *real* real."

It's hard sometimes for adults to remember how terrifying it is to be a child, having to navigate a world where you are hyper-aware of how small you are and without the emotional regulation skills to help you get through it. Tammi intentionally wanted the animatronics to have a larger-than-life presence, a means of forcing the audience back into that childhood space where everything around you feels Goliath. "When they were first put on their feet, so to speak, it was just overwhelming in the best possible sense," she tells us. "Their size and their scale and how scary that felt was paramount."

Surprisingly, and despite being the youngest member of the core cast, Rubio was enchanted by these twisted hunks of metal.

"PLAY 'FREE BIRD'!"

THE POPULARITY OF *FIVE NIGHTS AT FREDDY'S* HAS BEEN FUELED BY THE YOUTH, BUT PLENTY OF ADULTS HAVE AN AFFINITY FOR THIS NEW FACE OF FEAR.

"She immediately wanted to hug them every time she saw them, every time she got to set, and every time she left," says Tammi. "There was a real bond there. So terrifying as they are, they also have this other element about them, which is more dimensional and really exciting." And that's how they get you. These seemingly friendly, singing animal machines associated with birthday parties, arcade games, and endless slices of pizza can lull little ones in with a false sense of security before consuming them. It's no wonder so many hardcore *FNaF* fans are kids. Tammi now considers the animatronics like her own children, unable to pick a favorite, like any good mother.

Hutcherson and Rubio are joined by Elizabeth Lail as Officer Vanessa Monroe, Mary Stuart Masterson as a character only listed as "Aunt Jane," and Matthew Lillard as career counselor Steve Raglan, although fans are already convinced this is just another alias for franchise baddie William Afton. Tammi says getting to work with this excellent cast felt like "wish fulfillment," but that there was an added layer to the production as Masterson and Lillard's own children are already huge fans of the games. "They were breathing new life into these characters, but there is also this audience that is so excited for this story to be told and elements of it that we needed to really be faithful to," she tells us. "It was such a treat to have had people that I was such fans of to be able to work with, but really just the best bunch of human beings as well."

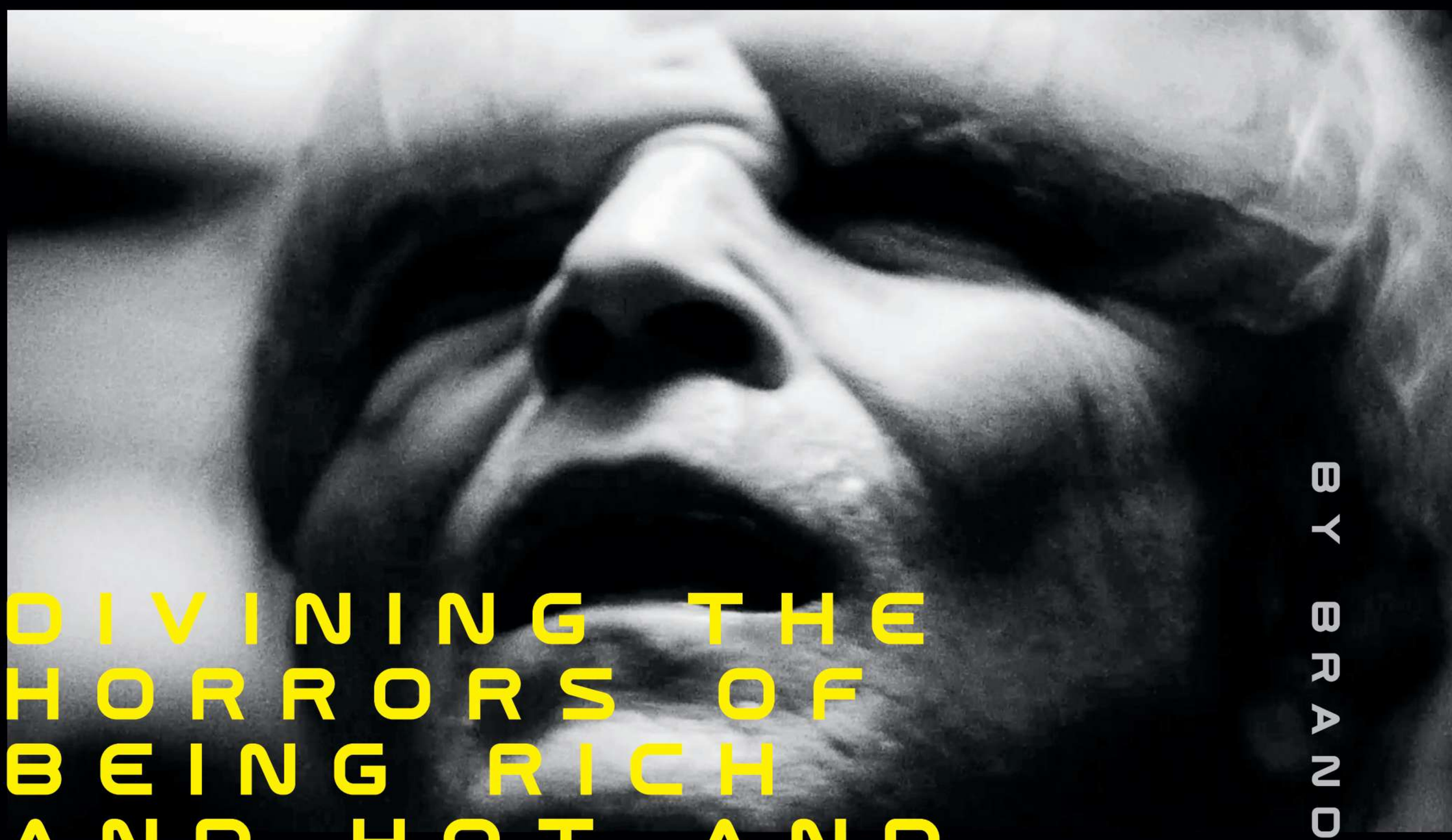
Five Nights at Freddy's is being released in the middle of the dual WGA and SAG-AFTRA strikes following the AMPTP's inability to provide a fair contract, so none of the actors are able to discuss or promote the film as part of the strike rules. Fortunately, *FNaF* fans have already proven to be one of the most effective branches on the Stan Culture tree, turning a micro-budget indie game into a multi-million dollar franchise. There's no way she could have predicted it at the time, but James Stephanie Sterling's *Evil Dead* joke at the expense of Cawthon's previous game is apt. *Five Nights at Freddy's* is the indie horror video game success story that Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead* indie horror film proved to be.

But the impact *Five Nights at Freddy's* has had on developing new generations of horror fans cannot be overstated, and the film will only continue the practice. For every adult gorehound who whines about a PG-13 horror release, there are a group of young people walking through the gateway to horror cinema for the first time. "I think those movies are few and far between and I think that they are so special," Tammi says. "They – at the risk of sounding cheesy – create these shared memories, not just in terms of the younger audiences that are going to remember seeing this with their fellow fans, but to be able to share with their parents and to be able to have both groups engaged on different levels, but still walk out of it having completely enjoyed the experience on slightly different wavelengths, but still with overlap."

After all, as the game points out, Freddy Fazbear's Pizza is a magical place for kids and grown-ups alike, where fantasy and fun come to life...

If you survive. 💀

EMMA TAMMI CONTINUES THE 2023 TRADITION OF WOMEN DIRECTING LARGE FAKE BEARS.



DIVINING THE HORRORS OF BEING RICH AND HOT AND IN SHAPE IN

DIVINITY

BY BRANDON WAINERDI

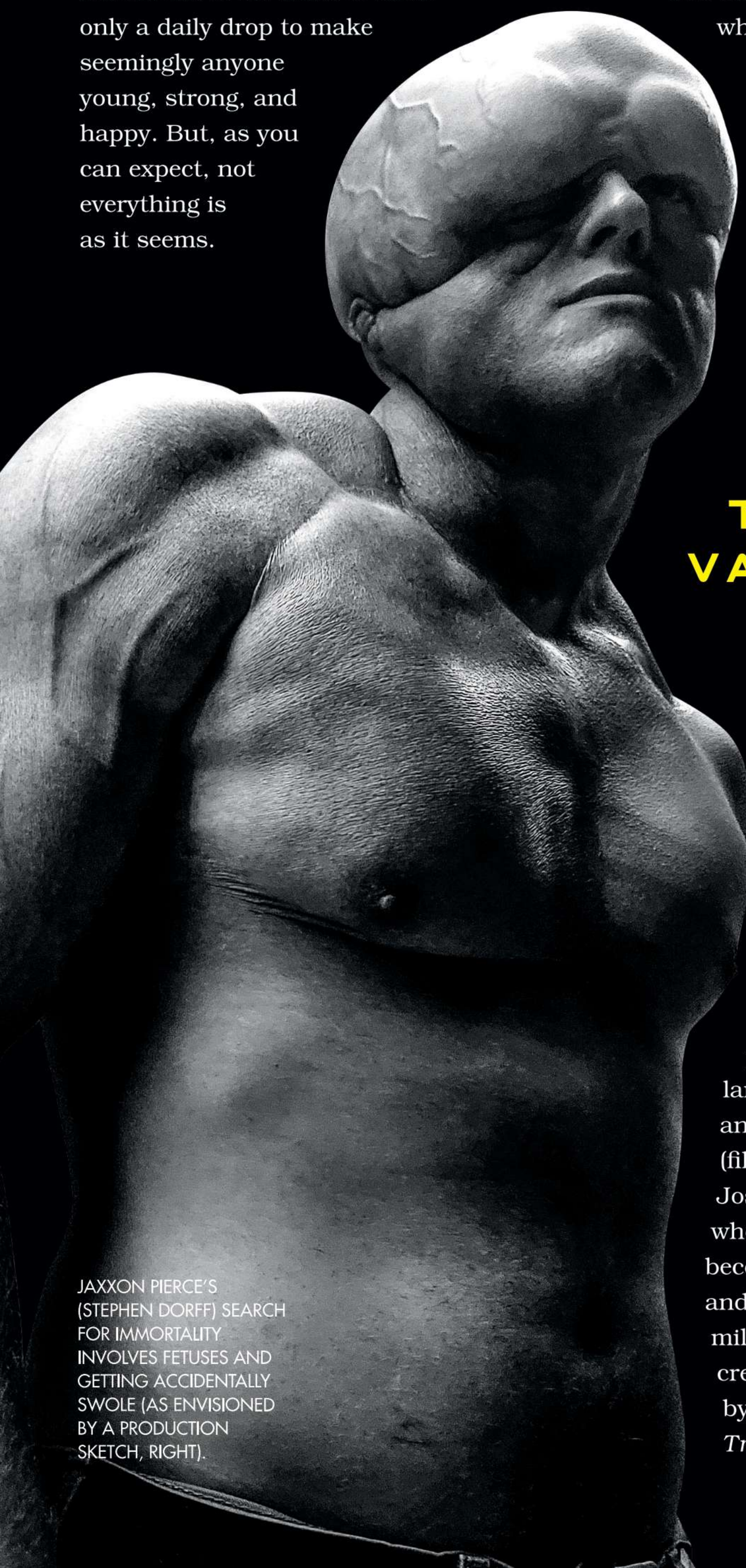
By now, we hopefully all know that these billionaire tech geniuses are actual monsters, but *Divinity* makes that idea a grotesque reality. This upcoming sci-fi horror film, dreamed up by multi-hyphenate director Eddie Alcazar (*The Vandal*, *Perfect*), made its debut earlier this year at Sundance, and hones in on the true costs of immortality and wealth.

Of course, these themes have been explored in the horror genre before (some could argue, ad nauseam), from every single vampire movie to *Society* to the more recent *Ready or Not*. For audiences, there is something either intrinsically frightening or incredibly enticing about the über-elite. We do not know them. We do not understand them. And yet, many aspire to become them.

Produced by Steven Soderbergh, *Divinity* is a moody, dark look at a near-future world that is almost jarring in its style (filmed on reverse processed black-and-white 16mm film, a specially made stock by Kodak). There is a new chemical product on the market, the eponymous Divinity drug, that grants eternal life to its taker. It takes only a daily drop to make seemingly anyone young, strong, and happy. But, as you can expect, not everything is as it seems.

As Alcazar explains, "The idea came about from books I've been reading on 'longevity.' All these different moguls and tech pioneers are trying to solve it. It's happening everywhere – even Google is trying to get their foot in the health vertical, trying to scoop death for some reason. But the big question is 'why?' Why would you *actually* want to live forever?"

Having Soderbergh attached, a director so prolific and boundary pushing (especially in his focus towards attainable shooting conditions and digital style), it seems odd at first that this movie would be shot on film and have such an emphasis on practical effects. But Alcarez brings up a great point: "He utilizes a lot of technology and does his films fairly quickly, which I also aspire to do. It motivates me to stay on my toes and problem solve, seeing if something can be done with a small budget... even if it's shooting on film and doing stop motion. I just put it all in a pot and navigate it."



"IMAGINE LIVING FOREVER. ARE WE GOING TO GET BORED? WHAT WOULD YOU DO WITH ALL THIS TIME? WHAT WOULD BE VALUABLE? IT'S PRETTY MUCH THE END OF HUMANITY."

– EDDIE ALCAZAR

The final concocted world of *Divinity* emerges from the pot as a well-navigated landscape of barren rocks and stark architecture (filmed on location in Joshua Tree). The characters who have taken the serum all become insanely muscular... and sterile. And their millionaire benefactor, the creator of the drug, is played by Stephen Dorff (*Blade*, *True Detective*), a stringy,

JAXXON PIERCE'S (STEPHEN DORFF) SEARCH FOR IMMORTALITY INVOLVES FETUSES AND GETTING ACCIDENTALLY SWOLE (AS ENVISIONED BY A PRODUCTION SKETCH, RIGHT).

raw tech genius who explodes onto the screen. “That's what's cool about working with really good actors. It’s just like, damn, they surprise you. It's amazing what happens when you just *unleash* them.”

The movie unleashes Dorff by first tying him up and forcibly injecting an enormous dose of the drug into veins. (“What is too much of a good thing?” Alacarez asks.) His head, his brain, becomes too large for his body, which quickly morphs to bulbously catch up, as well. The movie grows with him, as he is turned into a literal monster overnight. Is it just a personification of who he already was inside? According to its director, this is not a movie that answers questions, only asks them.

And it asks a lot of them. In Alcarez’s research leading up to the film’s production, he notes, “It all made me think of the concept of the afterlife. If people don’t really believe in it, and they don’t think there’s a better place once they die, they must want to sustain themselves here as long as possible. Right? These things all just kept swirling in my head.”

As the movie asks more and more questions, Dorff’s seemingly perfect body keeps changing into something that’s somewhat of a mutant, almost resembling the barren rocks that surround his desert home. “We had six different stages of the transformation,” Alcarez recalls. “The applications would constantly differ and grow over time, and we ultimately used a muscular body double for the end. It was a seven-hour application, with a team of really talented artists – Michael Nickiforek did the first stages of the transformation, and Miles Teves, who worked on the Darkness character in *Legend*, sculpted the last stage. It was all very challenging because we were in Joshua Tree and it was so hot, so the prosthetics were falling off constantly.”

The Dorff monster ends the movie in a climactic fight, shifting the cinematography into a fluid, video-game-inspired *Mortal Kombat* duel to the death. The world becomes stop-motion, or rather an extension of Alcarez’s “Meta-Scope” stop-motion technique, and the world of *Divinity* is strangely elevated. Alcarez explains: “Stop-motion, and Meta-Scope, is a technique that I love, and that I learned from my previous film.

“We spent like three months doing that sequence. Five seconds a day was all we could really get, with only one animator. The technique I developed combines live-action with stop-motion. We bring in the actors for just one day for the live-action elements in front of LED screens, where we’d project the actual stop-motion sets behind them, and then we just combine it all.”

The final result is maybe most similar to Ralph Bakshi’s Rotoscope work, and hammers home that *Divinity* is a fairy tale, an otherworldly morality play. “Imagine living forever. Are we going to get bored? What would you do with all this time? What would be valuable? It’s pretty much the end of humanity.”

At the very end of the movie, there is a special thanks credit for Elon Musk who, at the time of writing this, at least, feels like an ever-present specter online. Why? “Actually, Musk is a proponent of *not* living forever. He said that vocally a few times. He feels like it’s the worst thing possible. It’s funny. I met him at a party. In a way, he’s like Soderbergh, because sometimes it's hard to comprehend how they tackle so much.”

Do you really want to live forever? The director doesn’t seem to have an answer, either. “These are all questions that you take away from the film and, once you watch it, you ponder it as well." 💀

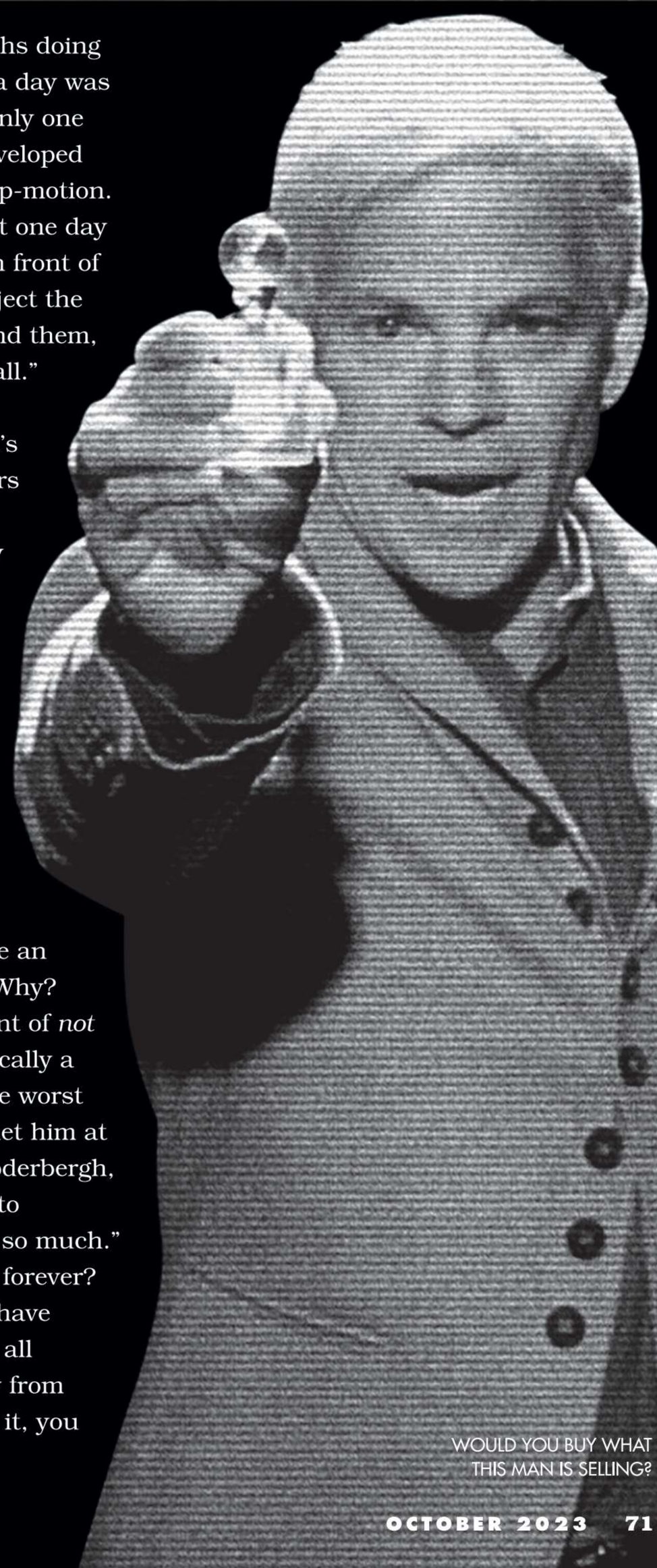


PHOTO COURTESY OF UTOPIA AND SUMERIAN

WOULD YOU BUY WHAT THIS MAN IS SELLING?

GOTH DAD WANTS YOU

TO BURN IT DOWN

BY PHIL NOBILE JR. / ILLUSTRATION BY TRAVIS KNIGHT

Dusty Gannon's journey from soldier to first responder to the impassioned, protest song-writing frontman of Vision Video has been a real-life horror story – but the singer is hopeful about its next chapter.

Let's make one thing clear up front: Vision Video is a seriously FUN band. Drawing on a variety of goth, new wave and post-punk influences, lead singer/songwriter Dusty Gannon and his bandmates deliver what they describe as "dance music for the end-times" – spooky-infused, infectious earworms that, once you hit play, soon find their way onto your playlists and into your brain.

We put this note at the top because, on paper, the music of Vision Video reads like maybe the bleakest shit imaginable: atmospheric goth music fueled by the frontman's traumatic life experiences, both as an infantry officer in the military and working as a firefighter/EMT during the pandemic. The effect is singular, and make no mistake: it is dark, political, and incredibly personal. But, as the kids on *American Bandstand* used to say, it's got a great beat and you can dance to it. On stage, on vinyl and on social media, it's clear that Gannon is having the time of his life exorcizing his demons.

And those demons, it's safe to say, go above and beyond those of your average rocker. Though Gannon is quick to characterize his wartime experience as "relatively mild," the lasting effects are plain to see in songs like "Kandahar" and "Cruelty Commodity," where the singer openly calls out the military industrial complex, and the lies he was fed to keep him feeding the war machine. "I just started to see the cracks in between the lines and just seeing what war – especially the American form of it – is," Gannon tells FANGORIA. "I started to have a really tough time stomaching this concept that I'm going to go over to some other country, and I might have to kill some people that I've never met that are more similar to us than we are to the people that are making us go to war against each other."

After a military career that included five years as an Infantry officer in the

PHOTO BY ALEXA JAE EYLER COURTESY OF VISION VIDEO

DUSTY GANNON AND EMILY FREDOCK BRING THE BLACK-CLAD PARTY TO THE STAGE.

active component and a deployment to Afghanistan, Gannon returned to civilian life just in time to take a job as a paramedic in the early days of the pandemic. Once home Gannon also began writing songs, with a sound inspired by musical heroes like The Chameleons, The Cure, Joy Division and others. But his lyrics, angry and passionate and calling for change, were something wholly different, and the disparity of sound and message might initially seem incongruous at best. But three years, two albums, and countless live shows later, Vision Video is connecting with audiences on levels that perhaps demonstrate the void that existed before they hit the scene.

Gannon formed Vision Video in 2020 while still working full-time as an EMT in Athens, Georgia. "I basically grew up here; I've left and come back here twice because it's got something special about it," Gannon says of his home base, the college town that birthed alternative music legends R.E.M., The B-52's and Pylon, among others. "Athens is the last little vestige of weird Southern cool to me. I kind of view staying here as a prerogative. I've got to keep it just a little weird." Initially a three-piece with Gannon on guitar and vocals, Jason Fusco on drums and Dan Geller on bass, the band's missing puzzle piece was found in Emily Fredock, a classically trained pianist who provides Vision Video's distinctive synths and occasional lead vocals.

Onstage and in photo shoots, Fredock and Gannon are dressed the part, black wings/tears/cracks running down pale white faces, their moody visages failing to hide the pure joy they experience in playing together. "Emily's a madwoman. She goes fucking ballistic on stage," Gannon effuses. With Fusco's propulsive beat, Geller's pulsing bass lines, and Gannon and Fredock's boundless energy up front, Vision Video's live shows are first and foremost a good time, though the messages in their songs are often something much more.

Side Two of Vision Video's debut album *Inked In Red* begins with the unmistakable voice of actor Tony Todd intoning, *"This is something that nobody has ever heard about, and nobody's ever seen before... This is hell on earth... This is pure hell on earth."* It's a line from Tom Savini's 1990 remake of *Night of the Living Dead*, Gannon's personal favorite of the Romero-verse (which, as is the case with most horror lovers' favorites, he first saw at 11 or 12.) The sample kicks off "Organized Murder," one of the angriest, most personal songs on the album, which draws on Gannon's experiences in Afghanistan. How a dialogue sample from a 30-year-old zombie movie ended up on an autobiographical track about marching toward death for your country is not only a canny illustration of how horror gets its hooks in us early, but an example of how the genre can help us get our heads around real-life horror.

"'Organized Murder' is a song distinctly about the process of war from the POV of a soldier who does not agree philosophically with the concept of war itself," says Gannon. "I took over a rifle platoon as a second lieutenant when I was commissioned as an officer. And I got these kids, literal kids, ready to go to war. Most were straight out of high school,

FREDOCK AND GANNON FINDING THEIR LIGHT BETWEEN GIGS.

VISION VIDEO'S LIVE SHOWS BETRAY THE GLOOMY GOTH STEREOTYPE.

and I trained them to kill. And then we went over to Afghanistan, and the whole time the only thing that kept me sane was: 'I've got to get these kids home, and I will do anything I have to, to protect them and to get them home.'

"But it's a very schizophrenic experience when you know in your heart that this is not good. The way that modern warfare works is it's this mass, organized murder, this undiscerning, random death machine that is literally based on luck. Were you standing there or an inch away when that bullet went just past your head? It has nothing to do with your 'prowess' as a warrior, and there's no real honor to it."

That feeling of despair unlocked a memory from Savini's film. "My favorite scene in *NOTLD '90* is the moment, after all that chaos of the first act, where he's talking about the mass carnage at the diner. He tells this super fucking scary story, and he delivers that line we used. And he literally says, 'It was like a *war*.' And I'm like, 'You nailed it.' The best part of the whole movie is this simple, quiet conversation in front of a fireplace where he breaks down, and he's processing what he just went through. And I've had that moment," Gannon shares.

"IT'S BECOMING MORE AND MORE APPARENT TO ME THAT A LOT OF BANDS ARE USING THIS KIND OF MUSIC AND THIS SUBCULTURE TO TELL STORIES AND CHAMPION THINGS THAT I THINK THAT WE ALL SHOULD BE CARING ABOUT."

- DUSTY GANNON

"The first time we got rocketed at night, explosions going off. And you're thinking, 'This is real, and nothing I can do will stop this.'

"When we were recording the song, I thought, 'There's got to be something that introduces the terror of war.' And something in my brain just went right back to that scene. I just remembered him saying, 'It was like a war.' And I was like, 'Damn, that's it.'"

On stage, Gannon is not content to let the setlist speak for itself, prone to passionate, fiery speeches between songs, screeds the likes of which pop music hasn't seen in decades (and which the Gen-Z goth crowd certainly hasn't seen in their lives). It's a jarring juxtaposition; recent horror-adjacent music acts haven't exactly been known for their socially conscious stances. Yet here's this Woody Guthrie in fishnets and monster makeup, telling the crowd to open their eyes about their government's hypocrisy before launching into songs like "Burn It Down," "Inked in Red," and "End of Days."

And it works. Even on more traditional tracks like "In My Side" and "Siren's Song," Gannon's personal history adds weight to the words. This is no emo kid navel-gazing; an otherwise straightforward song about trying to connect with someone you love hits differently when it's coming from a guy who's as haunted by actual loss as the singer. When Gannon sings "We won't be making it out of here" on "Broken Fingers," there's an authenticity to his despair that's undeniable. With imagery of friends dying in one's arms, or corpses piling up in hospital hallways, and with lyrics calling out the institutions that allowed those moments to happen to him (and to us), it's clear that Gannon's tracks are straight-up protest songs. And when's the last time you heard an actual protest song in pop music?

For Gannon, it's not the disconnect one might think. "Look at goth and where it came from. It came from punk rock. It came from the late '70s and early '80s where people were super disenfranchised." Nor does he think his band is some special unicorn.

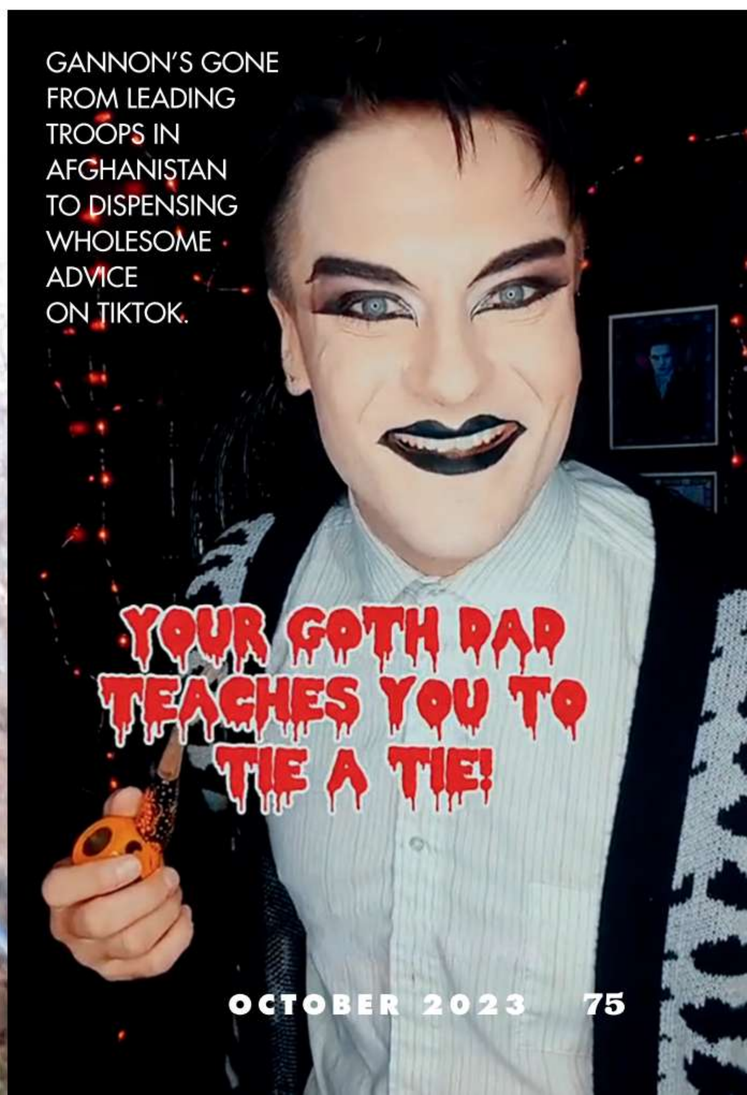

GANNON'S GONE FROM LEADING TROOPS IN AFGHANISTAN TO DISPENSING WHOLESOME ADVICE ON TIKTOK.
YOUR GOTH DAD TEACHES YOU TO TIE A TIE!

PHOTO (LEFT) BY JEREMY SAFFER / (TOP) ALEXA JAE EYLER COURTESY OF VISION VIDEO

"We've been playing so many shows and touring all over the world, and it's becoming more and more apparent to me that a lot of bands are using this kind of music and this subculture to tell stories and champion things that I think that we all should be caring about."

But as mentioned up top, Vision Video's body of work is not some bleak, foreboding catalog. Notes of hope and optimism cut through the anguish and buoy the heaviness, and before you know it, you're tapping along to the music and joining Gannon and Fredock on the choruses in your car (anecdotally speaking). And though Gannon's only been a full-time musician for about a year (his LinkedIn profile still shows him in his military uniform), Vision Video's two albums (*Inked in Red* and last year's *Haunted Hours*) and what can only be described as a heroic amount of touring are quickly putting them on the radars of music and horror fans alike. One notable booster has been Blumhouse producer Ryan Turek. "Dusty doesn't shy away from reminding his audience, through his lyrics, what he's seen in this world," Turek says, adding that "Vision Video is the kind of band we need right now. They're at this exciting intersection of all things goth, punk, spooky and, quite often, political that I hope will thrust them into a bigger spotlight."

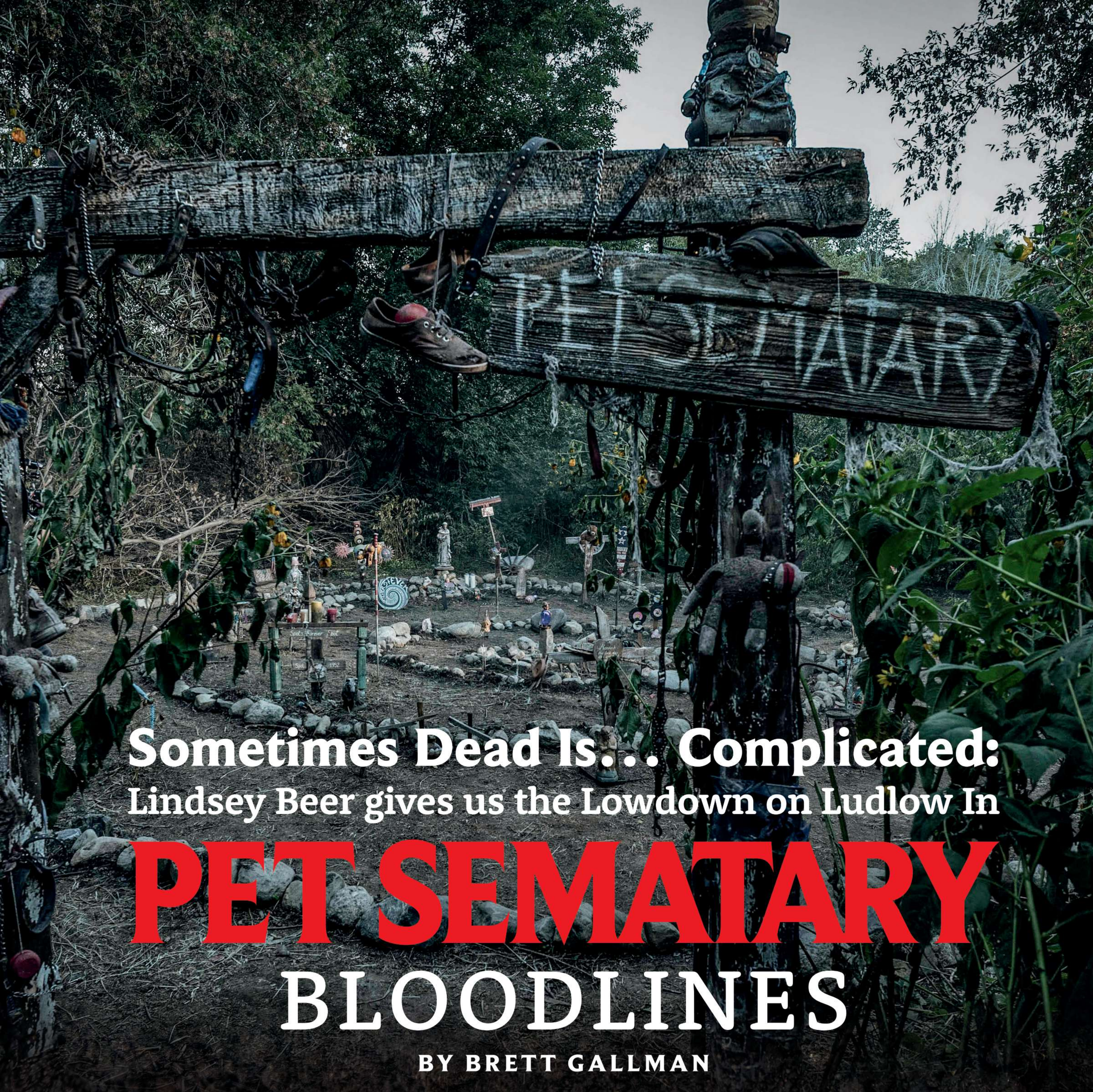
That bigger spotlight seems fully underway, augmented by an unexpected viral phenomenon: Gannon's TikTok side project, "Goth Dad." In full *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* makeup and a Minnesota accent that would give Frances McDormand pause, Goth Dad dispenses cheerful fatherly wisdom and encouragement to a rapidly growing follower count. "I had all this free time because I was still working as a firefighter and paramedic," Gannon says. "During the pandemic, I'd go to work for 24 hours, then I'd be off for 48, and there was nothing else to do. And for whatever reason, I thought, 'Wouldn't it be funny if there was a '50s style TV dad that was hyper wholesome, but was really goth and knew his shit, had been around the scene?'"

"DUSTY DOESN'T SHY AWAY FROM REMINDING HIS AUDIENCE, THROUGH HIS LYRICS, WHAT HE'S SEEN IN THIS WORLD."
- RYAN TUREK

A string of funny and affirmative videos, some with little life hacks – how to tie a tie, how to change the battery in your car, etc. – emerged. Goth Dad has since racked up millions of views, not just from fans appreciating the comedy, but from an audience that legitimately craves the paternal advice. "So many people come up to me at shows, and they're like, 'I never had a dad,' or, 'My dad died,' or, 'My dad left when I was X years old.' It's nice to be able to connect with so many people in a somewhat meaningful manner, and in ways that you never expected."

In that regard, both Vision Video and Goth Dad are less of a 180-degree pivot from his past life, but part of an ongoing mission for Gannon (who is, at this writing, gearing up for a new album called *Modern Horror*, and an FX-filled, genre-themed music video to be filmed at Athens' legendary 40 Watt Club). "My life is so different today. It's just about a year now that I've been gone from the fire department. Sometimes I miss going and helping people in such a literal way; it's almost overwhelming how much I miss it. But then I go out on tour and I get to talk to all these people and I realize I am still doing it – in a very different way, but it's just as satisfying. Some people out there just need just a little bit of comfort and a little bit of motivation to keep going. And I like to think that what we do, and the compassion that we're putting out into the world, is maybe helping somebody get by for just one more day until they can get to a better time."

VISION VIDEO: NOT YOUR PARENTS' POST-PUNK GOTH PROTEST BAND.



Sometimes Dead Is… Complicated:

Lindsey Beer gives us the Lowdown on Ludlow In

PET SEMATARY

BLOODLINES

BY BRETT GALLMAN

Throughout his career, Stephen King has warped his native Maine into the Twilight Zone by reimagining its sleepy, idyllic towns as cursed haunts. Recurring locations like Castle Rock and Derry may look as picturesque as their real-world counterparts, but an unfathomable evil lurks beneath the facade, creating an air of menace that becomes a character unto itself. The ground is especially sour in the small town of Ludlow, most infamously the setting of *Pet Sematary*, the 1983 novel that has only grown more notorious after multiple Hollywood interpretations. The latest entry, *Pet Sematary: Bloodlines*, dives deep into the novel's backstory to embellish the lore of King's eerie burial ground. In doing so, the film also reconfigures Ludlow into one of those signature King haunts, a place where evil is steeped in the stony soil and the hearts of men – which we know are even stonier.

Officially a prequel to the 2019 adaptation directed by Kevin Kölsch and Dennis Widmyer, *Bloodlines* unfolds in 1969, with the Vietnam War at its most destructive and most divisive. Even Ludlow hasn't been untouched by it, as the draft frequently draws its sons to the battlefield. One local boy, Timmy Baterman (Jack Mulhern), has quite literally been to hell and back thanks to his father (David Duchovny), who proudly announces his boy's return home. However, Timmy's old friends Jud (Jackson White) and Manny (Forrest

Goodluck) can't help but notice that something seems wrong, and their suspicion uncovers a conspiracy that stretches back through centuries, beyond the ominous deadfall leading to the ancestral Micmac land that's become the stuff of local legend.

While Constant Readers will be familiar with Timmy Baterman's ordeal from the novel and previous adaptations, *Bloodlines* doesn't simply fill in gaps or connect dots. Rather, writer/director Lindsey Beer rummages around King's sandbox, exploring the novel's implications and moral dilemmas to create a fresh chapter that recontextualizes the original tale. During an interview with FANGORIA, Beer reveals that she wanted her outing to have a purpose beyond simply exploiting a well-known IP. "For me, it needed a real reason to be," she says. "There were questions that I wanted answers to that I felt justified the existence of this movie and made me excited to want to make it." Being able to delve into the background to spin a different sort of yarn in this world was also appealing. "I wouldn't have taken it on if it felt like it was just people doing the same thing in *Pet Sematary*," she adds.

Beer was drawn to the novel's mythology and saw an opportunity to delve deeper into its superstitions. "What was most important in terms of the backstory was exploring the pet cemetery," she explains. "Where does that fit into the story? Where does this evil come from?" To answer these questions, *Bloodlines* weaves an elaborate web that not only entangles familiar characters like Timmy Baterman and Jud Crandall but also the entire town of Ludlow, a damned patch of land that's been hoarding secrets for generations. "I really wanted this to be not just an origin story for Jud, but also an origin story for Ludlow," Beer reveals. "I wanted to explore the evil of the cursed, sour land at the center of it, and the burden it puts on the town."

Despite digging deeper into the novel's mythology, Beer was careful not to go too far and completely demystify the nature of the story's evil. "The movie isn't too on the nose about it, but it implies that the Wendigo stuff was a superstition," she insists. "It gives people more of a window into the mythology." That window opens all the way back to Ludlow's colonial days with a flashback sequence that Beer was especially eager to shoot: "It was definitely ambitious shooting kind of a mini movie within the movie, but I really thought that it would add that extra layer of authenticity to feel the history of the evil more by showing it."

Still, *Bloodlines* ultimately lands on the notion of an unfathomable, Lovecraftian conception of pure evil. "It was important to subvert the Wendigo and hint at this ancient evil that was already there," Beer explains. "This isn't some indigenous curse – it was already there, and we don't say exactly what it is," an approach that taps into the cosmic dimension of King's work, where the Earth is very old and full of good and evil. "That's something that fascinates me as a human anyway, the cosmic side of things."

By capturing a cross-section of Ludlow (particularly the tight-knit cabal charged with keeping its secrets), *Bloodlines* carves a new dimension into King's novel. While the story's mantra has always insisted "sometimes dead is better," this entry reveals it's not as simple as that since the town's citizens are locked in an eternal struggle to stave off a seductive evil. This conflict was especially appealing for Beer. "What's it like growing up in a place where you can turn somebody into a zombie?" she muses. "There's such a devil's bargain that I thought was really fascinating." The conspiracy to live with that bargain feels indebted not only to King himself but also to classic Gothic horror stories unfolding on ancestral

"I WANTED TO EXPLORE THE EVIL OF THE CURSED, SOUR LAND AT THE CENTER OF IT, AND THE BURDEN IT PUTS ON THE TOWN."

- LINDSEY BEER

cursed grounds, a comparison Beer eagerly embraces when Hammer Films and *City of the Dead* are mentioned during our chat.

Casting a wider net also allowed Beer to weave the novel's central moral conflict through multiple characters and relationships. "The spirit of *Pet Sematary* was that ethical question of what would you do to spend one more day with pets or with the person you love," she says. "What would you do to protect somebody you love?" Where previous entries have watched these conflicts rip through unsuspecting families, *Bloodlines* observes the ripple effect they have on the entire town of Ludlow, an opportunity Beer immediately seized upon. "You see that play out in different relationships," she notes. "We see it with Bill and Timmy Baterman. We see it with Dan Crandall [Henry Thomas] lying to his son, trying to protect him. We see it in the boys' friendship as they try to protect each other, and we see it in the relationship between Manny and his sister Donna [Isabella LaBlanc]."

The bigger scope also results in the most rambunctious, genre-mashing *Pet Sematary* to date, as *Bloodlines* blends harrowing animal attacks, undead splatter movie outbursts, and slash-and-stalk carnage into a coming-of-age story about three childhood friends whose lives took separate paths. "I wanted this film to be an experience and a surprise where you don't know what's coming next," Beer explains. "I specifically wanted that different mish-mash quality. It has all those different elements, just like life does. Life isn't one genre."

This approach also enabled her to take the looming specter of the Vietnam War to heart, as she wanted the film to capture the chaos of a battlefield. "I wanted this movie to feel like it had all the elements of a war," she continues. "When talking to war consultants and my uncle, who served three tours in Iraq, everybody said the same thing – war isn't all shooting. It's not all scariness. It's not all fighting. There are tense stalking sequences. There's frenetic action where you don't know where the hell anything is coming from."

Horror fans might recognize the similarities between *Bloodlines* and Bob Clark's *Deathdream*, but Beer acknowledges another war movie altogether as her biggest inspiration. "The only specific influence that I drew from was *Apocalypse Now*, because of the Vietnam time period," she says before drawing a comparison between Coppola's seminal war movie and King's novel. "It also has those amazing, yellowish shots of the war landscape, and, in the book, King repeatedly describes the evil as yellow: yellow eyes, yellow smoke. I thought that was an interesting parallel. I wanted to bring that yellow through the film, both with the lighting and the cinematography."

Beer was also careful to capture the quieter moments of war, especially the camaraderie that develops between soldiers. "During battle, there's also hanging out, cracking jokes, being nostalgic, and talking about your families," she offers. Setting *Bloodlines* against the backdrop of Vietnam made for a natural allegory in this respect. "It was a time when so many people were coming of age while also having to fight brutal wars and fight ideologies within themselves," she says. "So a movie where there's a coming of age and friendship element alongside this horror and action felt very much of the time."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PARAMOUNT PLAYERS, A DIVISION OF PARAMOUNT PICTURES / PHILIPPE BOSSE

NORMA (NATALIE ALYN LIND) FOLKS AROUND (FACING PAGE) AND FINDS OUT.

BILL (DAVID DUCHOVNY) STARTS TO REALIZE HIS BOY TIMMY (JACK MULHERN, BELOW) CAME BACK DIFFERENT.

One particularly refreshing relationship unfolds between Manny and Donna, Native American siblings who represent a noticeable shift in the story's perspective. To date, *Pet Sematary* has leaned on indigenous mythology to conjure a boogeyman in the shape of a Wendigo without actually including Native characters, an approach that Beer wanted to resist. "We went through a time culturally where the mystical indigenous was a huge trope, from Stephen King to *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*," she mentions. "I feel like culturally we're beyond that now because once a trope becomes a trope, it's no longer entertaining, right?"

As such, Beer subverts this trope by giving indigenous characters a significant role within this prequel. "It was really important to me that Donna and Manny felt like substantial characters who had their own point of view and weren't just side characters or exploited for horror." In fact, Beer considers Goodluck's casting to be one of the most crucial parts of the film's production. "He's amazing. He's actually the first person I cast, and then I did chemistry reads off of him," she raves. "The casting was centered around him and Jud as the most recognizable characters, so in many ways I wanted it to be a two-hander that revolved around them. I wanted to make sure that he and Manny felt equal."

Beer also praises the rest of a cast that's arguably the most impressive to ever be assembled for a *Pet Sematary* film. "I'm still delighted and amazed by the cast that we got, and I'm hoping people will appreciate how much they actually see those characters in the film – it's not just like little cameos or anything," she explains before raving about how the cast came together. "They were all my first choices. I was shocked and so happy that all of them said yes."

She singles out Duchovny, whose Bill Baterman is so far removed from Fox Mulder that you could imagine him actually being one of those weirdos in *The X-Files* who gets investigated by Mulder and Scully. "David does an amazing job in *Californication* as a father, which is one of the things that made me want to go to him for this role," Beer reveals. "I've never seen him in a role quite like this, and he did a wonderful job." Genre fans should also delight at the presence of Pam Grier in the role of Majorie, a tough mail carrier who's privy to Ludlow's secrets. "I was like, we have to get Pam Grier for this because it's such a badass role, and she pulled it off," Beer says, noting that the veteran exploitation star also brought humor to the production. "It was so hard for me to not laugh behind the scenes. I had to cover my mouth a lot of times."

Humor isn't exactly synonymous with *Pet Sematary*, nor is the word "fun" often used to describe it, but Beer wanted to steer the story away from its bleak roots. "I hate when I see a movie and come away feeling like I need a shower or therapy," she says. "I didn't want to make something like that." Still, Constant Readers shouldn't worry: Beer is one of you, and recognizes the gravity of tackling this tale. "*Pet Sematary* was the first Stephen King book that I read, and the one that stayed with me as my favorite," she explains, acknowledging that certain considerations must be made with an adaptation. "It's always tricky when you're adapting anything beloved because you've got a fan base that feels very precious about some things. And those things are not the same for different people," Beer says. "Personally, the important thing is to always protect the spirit and intention of the property," something she felt she was able to do thanks to her connection to the book: "Anything that I felt I wanted to see more of as a fan is what I tried to infuse into the story."

BY ALYSE WAX

Gen X wants Gen Z DEAD in TOTALLY KILLER

In the tradition of *Freaky* and *Happy Death Day*, Nahnatchka Khan's new horror comedy asks the burning question: "What if *Back to the Future* was a slasher film?"

THINGS GET GRAVE IN THE GRAVITRON FOR PAM (OLIVIA HOLT).

Gen Z encounters Gen X while fighting a serial killer in the time travel horror-comedy flick *Totally Killer,* and it's the cross-generational meta slasher flick we didn't know we needed. In 2023, Jamie's (Kiernan Shipka) mom (Julie Bowen) is murdered on Halloween night by the same notorious serial killer who picked off her classmates in 1987. It would seem that he is finishing the job. The killer then turns on Jamie and chases her into her friend Amelia's (Kelcey Mawema) time travel machine prototype, made for the school science fair (naturally).

Their scuffle sends a butcher knife into the machine's control panel and before you can say "Michael Kennedy-esque elevator pitch," Jamie finds herself back in 1987. She uses this as an opportunity to find the killer, in the hope that if the killer is brought to justice before 2023, she might just save her mom's life. (And she's going to try her best to educate the problematic Xers while she's at it.)

The film is a bit of a departure for director Nahnatchka Khan, who has worked exclusively in comedy for over 15 years, most notably with *American Dad*, *Fresh Off the Boat*, and *Young Rock*. While she enjoys horror, she admits that her wife is the real fan. Khan had been looking for a "genre mashup" to direct for a while. "When producers Adam Hendricks and Greg Gilreath sent the script [by Jen D'Angelo, David Matalon and Sasha Perl-Raver] through, I just loved the concept. I thought it was so interesting and intriguing and smart and difficult to pull off, but would be really satisfying if you could."

And pull it off she did. *Totally Killer* is a delightful romp through an '80s we don't often see depicted these days, but OG readers of Fango will remember quite well. Zoomer Jamie is forced to work with the unenlightened teens of Gen X, and never quite gets through to them, whether it's about calling a classmate "fat," casual slurs, or grabbing a girl's butt. When the kids of 1987 look utterly confused by her scolding, she's forced to let it go in favor of the

JAMIE HUGHES (KIERNAN SHIPKA) DOES NOT LOVE THE '80S

bigger problem: the serial killer who is stalking local teens — and who's targeted her mother.

Khan tells FANGORIA that it was fun researching *Totally Killer* because it involved "watching old John Hughes movies, and then just a bunch of TikTok videos... it's funny to bring one generation into the other and just have them be themselves. It's not like they know another way. To me, it was really appealing to be able to play both those sides."

Since *Totally Killer* is a slasher movie, Khan took a lot of influence from John Carpenter's *Halloween*. "The idea of something evil in a modern day, in the suburbs. It felt like there was this dangerous presence in a mix of something that just felt like every day, and I liked that." Sam Raimi is another director who inspires her. "Everything he does is so inventive. He is, I think, one of the greats." Khan admits she put in little homages to some of the great '80s slashers, while still maintaining the integrity of the time travel plot.

If there is one thing audiences have learned from Michael Myers, from Jason Voorhees, from the Ghostface Killer, it's this: if you have a serial killer, he has to have a terrifying mask. From the beginning, Khan had the perfect idea. "There's nothing scarier than a handsome, entitled dude that's evil. It was important that he be blonde. So we started looking at handsome guys from that era, from the late '80s, and we were pulling all these references and giving him that *Lost Boys* vibe, that vampire with the black eyes and the cross earring and perfect white teeth. And that's how it started, the idea of a handsome man being terrifying." The mask they ended up with was made by Tony Gardner at Alterian Inc. "They were amazing," Khan enthuses.

Virtually all of the gore was done practically, a challenge compounded by shooting in actual locations which, ideally, the production doesn't ruin. For example, there is a waterbed kill scene in which both victim and bed are thoroughly slashed; a homeowner nightmare. "But we're in this nice couple's house and we can't destroy their bedroom. We have to leave it the way we found it." However, such moments also led to some strartlingly brutal kills, featuring what Khan calls "death improv": "We know the things that we definitely want to get, but have fun with it. You're in the moment, you're being stabbed to death, what would you do? How would you react?"

One of the most important props in the film is the Gravitron, a carnival ride known for using centrifugal force to keep riders suspended against the wall while the floor drops out. Khan says they had to find some Canadian carnies who would rent them a Gravitron for three days. "It felt like we were in a coffin for three days shooting, but it just looks great. That was something that you just can't fake." The cast and crew couldn't ride the Gravitron on set because it was kitted out with lighting, and panels were removed to fit in cameras, but Khan assures me they all had a go of it before it was brought to the stage.

Khan is careful to point out that this is specifically a serial killer movie, with no demons or supernatural elements. "That, I think, would be its own set of challenges." But there are similarities between comedy and horror: the idea of set-up and payoff. "It's similar in horror and comedy, where it's the anticipation before the scare that makes the scare (or the lack of it). With comedy, it's the setup that makes the joke hit, that makes the punchline land."

The biggest difference between horror and comedy, Khan notes, is in the editing process. "The setup and the joke, in comedy, is very rhythmic. And in the horror scenes, I found that we were starting to edit off-rhythm. And that's really what makes those scares pop. Because when you're watching a movie and you think, 'Oh, he is going to jump out.' You're setting it up for the audience to anticipate something. And then, when it doesn't happen that way, that's when they relax, and then you hit them with it. I think if you balance the two together, you keep the audience off-balance themselves. They don't know what's coming, and it was really cool to see and experience."

At the end of the experience, Khan has decided that horror is harder to pull off than comedy. "I do think that to really nail it depends what kind of scares you're going for. There are so many different variations in horror: the slow build, the tension, the jump scares, and then the actual scares. There are so many elements that go into all of it." It's all worth it for the audience screenings, though. "When the audience jumps at something or gets scared at a certain point, that's so satisfying to me." 💀

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AMAZON PRIME / JAMES DITTIGER / BETTINA STRAUSS

MARISA (STEPHI CHIN-SALVO) DOESN'T SURVIVE THIS PARTICULAR TIMELINE.

By Abbie Bernstein

A Divine Visit to the Set of DANTE'S HOTEL

The Tubi title dives into the seedier, spookier elements of Los Angeles' hospitality scene.

JENNIFER CASTILLO IS ALL TIED UP IN KNOTS.

If you waste time at Dante's Hotel, time may waste you. So goes the premise of the new film from director Anthony C. Ferrante, who wrote the screenplay with William C. Martell.

In *Dante's Hotel*, which premieres this fall on Tubi, Father Time (Kevin Porter) is a malevolent figure stalking the Dantenu Hotel, ornate scythe in hand. But is he a cloaked serial killer, or something more diabolical?

Ferrante explains that his original notion for Dante's Hotel was based on L.A.'s notorious Cecil Hotel and the supposedly haunted Hollywood Roosevelt. "I thought, it would be interesting if you think that it's a serial killer, and you take up residence in the hotel, and then you slowly [learn] it's the hotel that's the problem. You have this slasher element, and then it starts getting into the supernatural."

Most of the Dantenu's exteriors and interiors were shot at the 100-year-old Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. However, more interiors are being filmed today on soundstages in Chatsworth, California. Ferrante points out that one set, which looks like a steel tunnel on the inside (the outside is wood and canvas), was repurposed from season 6 of *Teen Wolf*.

Judd Nelson stars as Daniel Brayer, a troubled man still trying to investigate exactly what happened to his parents 48 years earlier. The actor says of his character, "When I was 12, I saw my parents get murdered by some big, dark figure. And no one believed me. Meanwhile, everyone thinks I'm the bad guy."

Horror stalwart Ted Raimi, who plays the hotel's snappily dressed proprietor Mr. Emitt, echoes Ferrante's assessment. "It goes without saying how powerful Judd is on camera. But what I didn't know is – I'd never worked with him [before] – he really cares about all the material. Most actors, especially if it's a horror movie, will just breeze through it, like, 'Yeah, ghosts, monsters, whatever.' Judd does not do that. He's quite an analytical guy, and he knows how to present those ideas in ways that both Anthony and I understand."

Ferrante says he was immediately excited when Nelson was suggested for the part. "Judd threw himself into this, and he's so good. There's a quirkiness to him; you're not sure if Brayer is dangerous or not." And regarding Nelson's co-star Raimi, Ferrante observes, "Ted understands how to straddle the scary and being in the moment. He's wonderful."

Brayer attracts suspicion from police detective Stone, played by Moon Bloodgood. She explains, "I'm working robbery/homicide, and I'm investigating what, first off, seems to be a guy who jumped from the roof of the Dantenu Hotel, and then it starts to escalate." Ferrante acknowledges that he has long been a Bloodgood fan. "I knew how good she was from *Falling Skies* and *Journeyman* – she's a powerhouse."

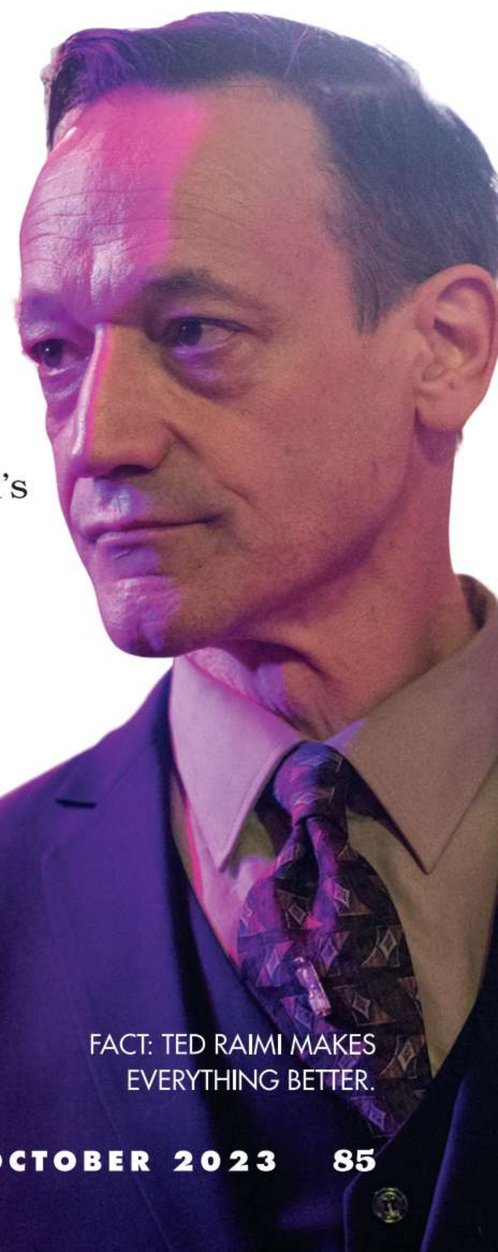
Joining the dubious hospitality establishment is AnnaLynne McCord as Goldie, who has been hired to run the hotel's New Year's Eve party.

"AnnaLynne is great, really fun," Ferrante enthuses. Nelson adds, "I'm having fun with all the actors. They're all great – they're really troupers. You have to come ready. We have twenty hours' [worth of material] to shoot in twelve hours. In this kind of environment, it would be easy to have a director who is yelling and screaming. It makes people tense, and mistakes are made. So, Anthony's nature, being a kind man, is helpful."

"Today is actually our biggest day for effects," says first assistant director Roberta Sparta. It's a big day overall, with nine scenes scheduled, plus a tenth if time permits. Sparta has worked on previous features with Ferrante, as have a number of other cast and crew members, including both directors of photography, Jeffrey Carolan and Michael Su, and special effects makeup designer Vincent Guastini.

Guastini and his makeup effects team of Monique Paredes, Eric Yoder, and Jake Porath almost simultaneously apply prosthetic slashes, gashes, and disemboweled guts to more than ten actors in their work area.

Bloodgood is here, as well, quizzing Guastini and his crew about their favorite practical effects. (Everyone agrees: Rob Bottin's creations for John Carpenter's *The Thing*.)



FACT: TED RAIMI MAKES EVERYTHING BETTER.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TUBI

(LEFT) THE WALLS COME FOR SHANE LIBURD; (RIGHT) THE BASHED BRAINS OF BRENT BAILEY.

"It's been a crazy day," Guastini allows. "We had a very short amount of time to prep everything, but we came together on this one."

Some of the makeup, like that being applied to Brett Bailey, Angela Cole, and Shane Liburd, includes relatively traditional silicone and foam appliances. A wrecked mouth is made with a Pros-Aide set of lower teeth covered in blood, and a foam chin piece ripped open down the middle. These are shaded in gore with alcohol palettes, acrylics, silicone paint, and/or gel-based blood. Paredes points to one actress' circular marks. "We're just starting that as a base, we're adding texture in the skin, so it looks blotchy. Her character was in a freezer, her head caved in, she lost an arm."

A more complicated installation shows the aftermath of a character cut in half by an elevator. A gaping chest piece goes under the performer's breasts, with a Velcro snap on the back, and flaps that match her skin tones that fan out over her hips.

When it's time to shoot, the makeup effects team huddles around the camera monitors in video village, in case they are needed on set for touch-ups or repairs. At one time an SFX makeup supervisor himself, Ferrante relates, "Tubi told me it's the bloodiest movie they've ever made. It was a thrill they let us go that far. Vincent and Monique doing old-school techniques throughout has a lot more impact than relying on CGI for everything."

Raimi is delighted to not be in SFX makeup for once. "This might be the first horror film where I don't have massive amounts of prosthetics on. Prosthetics are a young man's game."

Emitt, says Raimi, is "absolutely fastidious with regard to the look of the hotel, who he hires for the hotel. AnnaLynne McCord, who plays Goldie, is a remarkable actor, and she is wonderfully nervous through most of it during scenes where I have to supervise her."

Raimi, Bloodgood, and Guastini all fondly recall being interviewed by Ferrante when he was a reporter for FANGORIA decades ago. The amicable director was definitely part of the appeal when it came to signing on for *Dante's Hotel*. Also, says Raimi, "The script was great, and who wouldn't want to meet the guy who made *Sharknado*?"

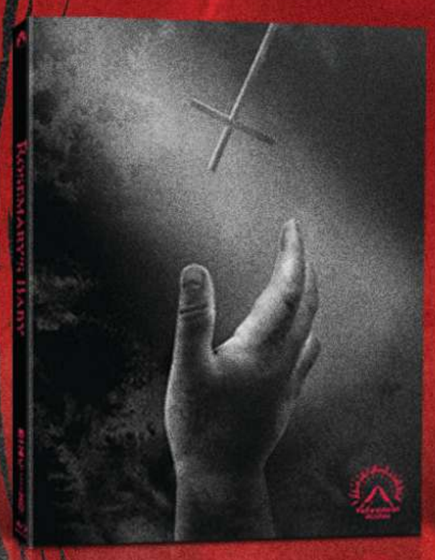
While Ferrante has made other horror movies (including last year's award-winning *Nix*), as well as Westerns, Christmas movies, and even a time-travel musical, he's still famed for creating and directing the absurdist shark franchise. *Dante's Hotel* has a more serious tone, although Ferrante says, "The good thing is, I don't think you know exactly where it's headed."

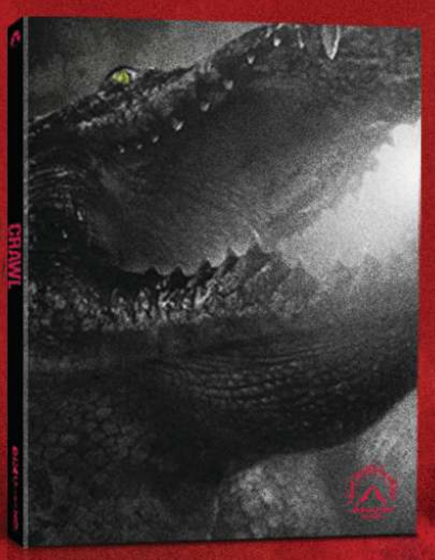
Between set-ups, Ferrante and Raimi confer about blocking for an upcoming scene. Is this sort of director-performer discussion customary? "One hopes it would be [with] every director you work with," Raimi replies. "But that rarely is the case. We have such a quick shooting schedule, to be able to go back and forth with the director on new ideas is very unusual. Anthony is unbelievably caring and well-organized and restrained, but his enthusiasm levels for the absurd, the bizarre, and the unusual are extremely high, and very refreshing."

Summing up his thoughts on *Dante's Hotel*, Ferrante concludes, "I think it came together really well. We had a blast making it. Tubi has been fantastic. They wanted something big, and they gave us the time and the budget to make it. It's a fun ride, and I think it's going to surprise people." 💀

LOOKS LIKE SOMEONE (TALYN EDELSON AND CRAIG NG) STAYED IN THE POOL TOO LONG.

A LEGACY OF HORROR REANIMATED





PARAMOUNT SCARES

Includes:

- Collectible Slipcovers
- Logo Enamel Pin
- Sticker Sheet
- Special FANGORIA Paramount Scares Edition
- Mystery Movie debut on 4K Ultra HD™

SOMETIMES DEAD IS BETTER
IT'S SMILING AT ME
ALL OF THEM WITCHES
DANGER
Pray for Rosemary's Baby
THIS IS MY SCARY MOVIE WATCHING WATER BOTTLE

PARAMOUNT SCARES Introduces
First Limited-Edition Creepy Collection
Available on 4K Ultra HD™ October 24th

CRAWL
RESTRICTED R BLOODY CREATURE VIOLENCE, AND BRIEF LANGUAGE
For more information on film ratings, go to www.filmratings.com

PET SEMATARY
RESTRICTED R
For more information on film ratings, go to www.filmratings.com

ROSEMARY'S BABY
RESTRICTED R
For more information on film ratings, go to www.filmratings.com

SMILE
RESTRICTED R STRONG VIOLENT CONTENT AND GRISLY IMAGES, AND LANGUAGE
For more information on film ratings, go to www.filmratings.com

© 2023 Paramount Pictures

HOWARD BERGER READIES HENRIK VAN RYZIN FOR HIS ROLE AS THE MOUTH BITCH VAMPIRE IN *FROM DUSK TILL DAWN*.

HOWARD BERGER, NIGHTMARE CRAFTER: PART ONE

BY JE NEILL

THE LEGENDS MAKEUP ACADEMY CO-FOUNDER GOT SO MUCH DIRT FROM THE KNB EFX GROUP CO-FOUNDER, WE'RE MAKING THEIR CONVO A TWO-PARTER!

I've known Howard Berger for many years and am happy to call him a friend and colleague. He's accomplished so much in his career, having worked on over 800 productions in many capacities. He's been a mold maker, sculptor, fabricator and beyond in the makeup lab, heading up giant overseas productions like the *Chronicles of Narnia* films and committing himself to the Board of Governors for the Make-up and Hair Stylists branch of the Academy of Motion Pictures. His vast experience and knowledge in all things makeup are a coup for our branch of the Academy.

The last time we worked together was on *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*. He was heading up the fabulous makeup designed for Jamie Foxx as Electro. The only other time we worked together was on the film *Priest*, with all of the cool creature effects created by KNB EFX, Howard's company with Greg Nicotero. I think I would have really enjoyed working with Howard and his crew on some of the many projects they did, but alas, my path took me in a different direction.

Howard defines himself as a lifelong cinephile and attributes this to the fact that his father also worked in the industry as a post-production sound editor who loved films. When Howard was a child, his father introduced him to the Universal Monster film classics, and that was all she wrote.

"My very favorite classic monster is *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*. After I saw those movies, I thought, 'What the hell. Somebody must make these things. I want to do that.'" So at eight years old, Howard's grandfather took him to Sig Frends Beauty Supply and bought him Michael Westmore's book, *The Art of Theatrical Makeup for Stage and Screen*, as well as some alginate and supplies so he could cast his own face. All through his younger years, Howard dabbled in FX, and when he got to high school his drama coach at Chatsworth High would pick shows that required makeup so Howard could practice his trade for the productions.

"I learned how to make prosthetics – they were all shit, of course – and run foam latex, and I destroyed my mother's oven. You know, foam latex-flavored chicken? When I was twelve years old, I packed up a box of a bunch of junk I had made and walked a mile down the road to Stan Winston's shop. I had just seen *The Star Wars Holiday Special* and Stan was credited. So I went on a mission. Stan was cool, he told me as long as I kept up my grades at school, I could come visit his shop. He also told me I could get a job there when I got out of high school."

FELLOW CHATSWORTH HIGH SCHOOL CLASSMATE ALAN ETO DONS 16-YEAR-OLD HOWARD BERGER'S FIRST MULTI-PIECE PROSTHETIC MAKEUP FOR THE SCHOOL PLAY *DARK OF THE MOON*.

Howard read every issue of the *Famous Monsters of Filmland*, and eventually he ventured out to a sci-fi convention in Los Angeles where he saw Rick Baker speak. He knew at this point that he had found his calling. He said he basically stalked Baker and Winston. Now, you would probably get arrested for that. As Howard put it to me, "It was the wild, wild west back then." There still weren't that many of us makeup effects artists, so you could be a lot more focused on your goals. Like so many other younger artists of the time, Howard was inspired by Dick Smith, Greg Cannom and Rob Bottin, in addition to Baker and Winston.

Howard started out working on smaller projects like *Troll* and *Ghoulies* at John Buechler's lab. Afterwards, he went to work for Stan Winston on films like *Predator*, *Aliens*, *Invaders from Mars* and *Pumpkinhead*. Stan was a great boss who made good on his promise to Howard. "I learned a lot working for Stan. I thought, 'If I ever get my own shop, I want to run it like Stan does.' He was very kind to everybody. If we had to work on the weekends, Stan would be there, too. He said we start at 8am, not 8:01, so I would get there at 7am and wait just to make sure." After working with Stan, Howard went on to Rick Baker's, something he'd been dying to do. He made molds for *Harry and the Hendersons* and also worked with Kevin Yagher on *Child's Play*, helping to create Chucky.

Howard reminisced on what it was like working in the shops back then. One of the things he observed was that there were really only two women: Eryn Krueger Mekash and Camille Calvet. Plus, everybody worked on everything – it wasn't as departmentalized as it is now. Sometimes that was a good thing – sometimes, less so. "When working for Rick, I was in the mold department and nineteen years old. I remember I screwed something up and Rick came in holding the screw-up and said, 'Hey,

BERGER DOING HIS PART TO BRING CHUCKY TO LIFE ON THE SET OF *CHILD'S PLAY*.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HOWARD BERGER & VE NEILL

CRAIG OLEJNIK STEPS UP TO THE PLATE AS THE TORN PRINCE IN *THIRTEEN GHOSTS*.

we don't do work like this here!' I was just mortified, and still am to this day – and that was forty years ago."

He went on to tell me about his first location job in 1985, working for three months for Tom Savini on *Day of the Dead* in Pittsburgh. "Working for Tom was great. I was making a ton of money, a whole $300 a week." He put the new salary to good use. "I had ditched my crappy $400-a-month apartment in Van Nuys that I shared with Everett Burrell. In fact, we lived upstairs from two other FX guys, Mitch Devane and John Vulich." The apartment was so awful that when Howard's mother came to visit, she cried. But, Howard says, "I loved it. I had monster stuff on the walls, posters and masks. It was really fun. Pittsburg is where I met Greg Nicotero and formed my 40-year friendship and 35-year business relationship. I considered that time of my life like college years."

Howard worked for six years for other makeup effects designers including Baker, Winston, Yagher, Buechler, Mark Shostrum and Allan Apone at Makeup & Effects Laboratories. "I feel like I owe my career to all of them, really."

After Yagher made Howard the shop foreman on *A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master*, applying makeup to none other than Freddy Krueger, "I was thinking to myself that this was the best it was ever going to be, and I couldn't move upward anymore. At the time I was sharing a house with Robert Kurtzman and Greg Nicotero. We decided to quit our jobs and start our own company. I think we each had about $700 to our names. Everybody thought we were going to fail. Our first job was a super low-budget film called *Night Crew*. We each took an effect and worked on it. We made about $1000, and that's how it started. Word got around that there were these new guys that did really good work for really cheap, and they are fun to work with. So, our business began to build. We did a lot of really low-budget gore films. In fact, we were known as 'the Gore Guys.' We were so poor in the beginning, we would rotate buying a bucket of KFC for the week and we had to make it last for the whole week. We would break into the soda machine we had at the shop to buy food because we were starving."

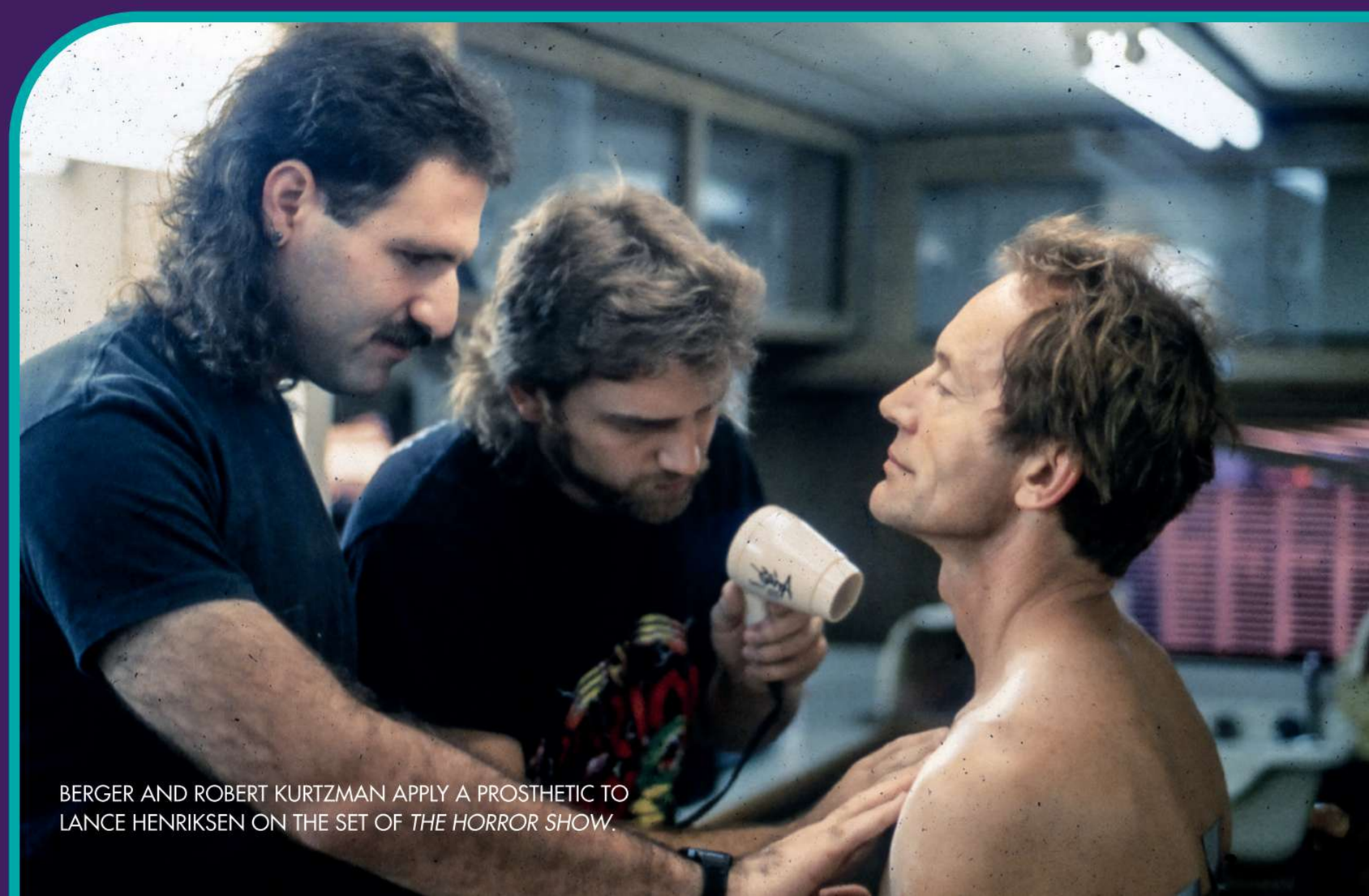
But as word got around, the K, N and B behind KNB weren't destined to starve for long. They interviewed for a Disney Studios film called *Gross Anatomy*, and they bid so low that they got the film even though they were "just a bunch of kids." Howard wagers they didn't make any money on the job, but it was an important stepping stone.

"One day we got a call from Kevin Costner. We went in to meet him and he said, 'I saw this movie *Gross Anatomy* where you made all these dead bodies. If you can do dead bodies, you can do dead buffalos.' So, of course we said we could do it, but we didn't know what we were talking about. That film turned out to be *Dances with Wolves*. Thankfully by this time we had gotten a proper 2500 square foot shop in Chatsworth. We had to make sixteen buffalos, but they were so big we could only do one at a time. We built them to do double duty because sometimes they had to look skinned and other times, they had to have fur on. We sculpted them skinned and made fur suits for them. Because we could only make one at a time, we rented a storage unit down the street. However, the only vehicle we had to transport them was Greg's 1972 green convertible Cadillac El Dorado. We would put the poly foam buffalo in the back seat and take them to storage as they finished. There was one time where we got stopped by the police wanting to know why we had a dead buffalo in our back seat. An explanation ensued."

Thanks to *Dances with Wolves*, KNB had proven they could do more than just gore.

"Our reputation began to build and so did the business. We have gone on to win an Oscar and Emmys. Greg is also producing and directing. Bob left the company to return to Ohio about nineteen years ago. We love what we do, and I wake up every morning happy to go to work, because this is my passion." 💀

Ve Neill's conversation with Howard Berger continues in our next issue!



BERGER AND ROBERT KURTZMAN APPLY A PROSTHETIC TO LANCE HENRIKSEN ON THE SET OF *THE HORROR SHOW*.

LEGENDS
Makeup Academy

www.legendsmakeup.com

Offering a Wide Range of Hands-On Classes Designed for Both Pro and Aspiring Makeup Artists

Taught by
Ve Neill & Other Makeup Legends

- **Character Aging & De-Aging**
- **Character Trauma**
- **Conceptual Sculpture**
- **Mold Making & Sculpting Appliances**
- **Prosthetics Application Mastery**
- **Period Makeups (1920s-1980s)**
- **Teeth Creation**
- **Hair Ventilating Classes (I, II, III)**

***Each course is one week long. Only take the classes you want.*

Scan QR Code for Upcoming Classes

Save 25%
Use Promo Code
FANGOFALL23

info@legendsmakeup.com

747.305.3942

TALES FROM THE SUNKEN PLACE

In Out There Screaming, *Jordan Peele has curated and edited a new Black Horror anthology book with some of the most important authors working in the genre today.*

The Jordan Peele-edited anthology *Out There Screaming* promises to be the most exciting fiction collection of the year. Gathering new horror stories from nineteen Black authors, the book represents an extension and an evolution of the work coming out of Peele's Monkeypaw Productions.

As Peele notes in his foreword, horror is "a way to work through your deepest pain and fear – but for Black people that isn't possible, and for many decades *wasn't* possible, without the stories being told in the first place." Peele's collection (co-edited by John Joseph Adams) is both a corrective measure and an exciting next step in the genre.

We talked with three of the anthology's contributors – Tananarive Due, Rebecca Roanhorse, and N.K. Jemisin – to find out more about the anthology.

Tell us about your contribution to this collection.

Rebecca Roanhorse: My story, called 'Eye & Tooth,' is about a brother and sister monster-hunting duo. It's a little more fun than scary, although there are some scary parts, and it was inspired by my aunt who was an award-winning doll maker in Texas.

N.K. Jemisin: My story is called 'Reckless Eyeballing.' It's about a cop who sees evil everywhere – or at least, he thinks that's what he's seeing. It was inspired by a trip I took to the Outer Banks in North Carolina last year, which I did not enjoy, in part because there were so many 'signifying' bigots around – Thin Blue Line flag-wavers, Confederate flag t-shirters, 'Trump Won' signs, etc. I partly grew up in Alabama so when I tell you NC was worse, that should tell you something. But hey, at least I got a new story out of it.

Tananarive Due: 'The Rider' is my homage to isolation horror meets U.S. racial history: horror from the open road. One of my favorite shots in horror films is the aerial view of the lone vehicle on a narrow road in the wilderness, where anything can happen. I've also been impacted by my parents' stories of being followed on the road during the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

My late mother, Patricia Stephens Due, and my 88-year-old father, John Due, were very active in the civil rights movement and remained active throughout their lives. I remember how they insisted that I could not drive by myself when I had an internship in Kentucky, with one driving there with me and one helping to drive me home. In more recent years, after being pulled over by a Mississippi Highway Patrolman for a fabricated reason while I was driving a lonely road at night with my father, I realized that those old fears are still tied to lingering realities – he stopped us only because we were Black.

During the 1960s, activists Black and white staged "Freedom Rides" throughout the South to challenge segregation on public

transportation. Although my late mother did not participate in the Freedom Rides, she is in the Florida Civil Rights Hall of Fame for her activism, including being a part of the first 'Jail-In' staged by students at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, Florida. My aunt, 85-year-old Priscilla Stephens Kruize, also participated in that 'Jail-In' – and she was kicked in the stomach by a police officer at the Tallahassee Regional Airport when she went to support the Freedom Riders.

With my aunt's permission, I named my characters after my mother and aunt. Although this story is fiction, it is meant to honor the activists, like them, who suffered lingering trauma because of their activism.

A Monkeypaw-curated anthology is an exciting proposition. What makes this collaboration special for you?

Due: *Get Out* was such a cultural touchstone in helping the world understand and appreciate the existence of Black Horror, so it's very fitting that Jordan Peele would compile a Black Horror anthology.

Roanhorse: Thanks to Peele and others, Black Horror is hotter than it's ever been. I think that really speaks to the creativity and originality of its creators who are telling stories people want to hear and perhaps have never heard before.

Due: As he wrote in his introduction, these are stories from The Sunken Place in its myriad forms and interpretations. Not every Black Horror story is about confronting race, or trying to repair history, but each of these authors brings a nuanced perspective to the nexus between racial experience and terror. The window to the universal is through the specific, as *Get Out* showed us – and these stories are written very much in that spirit.

What most excites you personally about *Out There Screaming*? What do our readers need to know to get themselves ready for this collection?

Due: It has been so thrilling for me to see the emergence of so many other Black Horror writers since I published my first novel, *The Between*, in 1995. As a lifelong horror fan, I had no choice but to identify with white protagonists while suffering the marginalization or absence of characters who looked like me. But no more! This anthology represents the growing Black revolution in horror, with authors from many backgrounds telling different stories through a Black lens.

Roanhorse: It's thrilling that this collection exists and has such a stellar TOC [table of contents]. All the stories are so different from each other and masterfully executed. I think readers will be happily surprised by the diversity of story and talent. It may be Black Horror, but its existence feels a lot like Black joy, too.

Jemisin: I'm going to enjoy appearing in that TOC alongside some amazing writers.

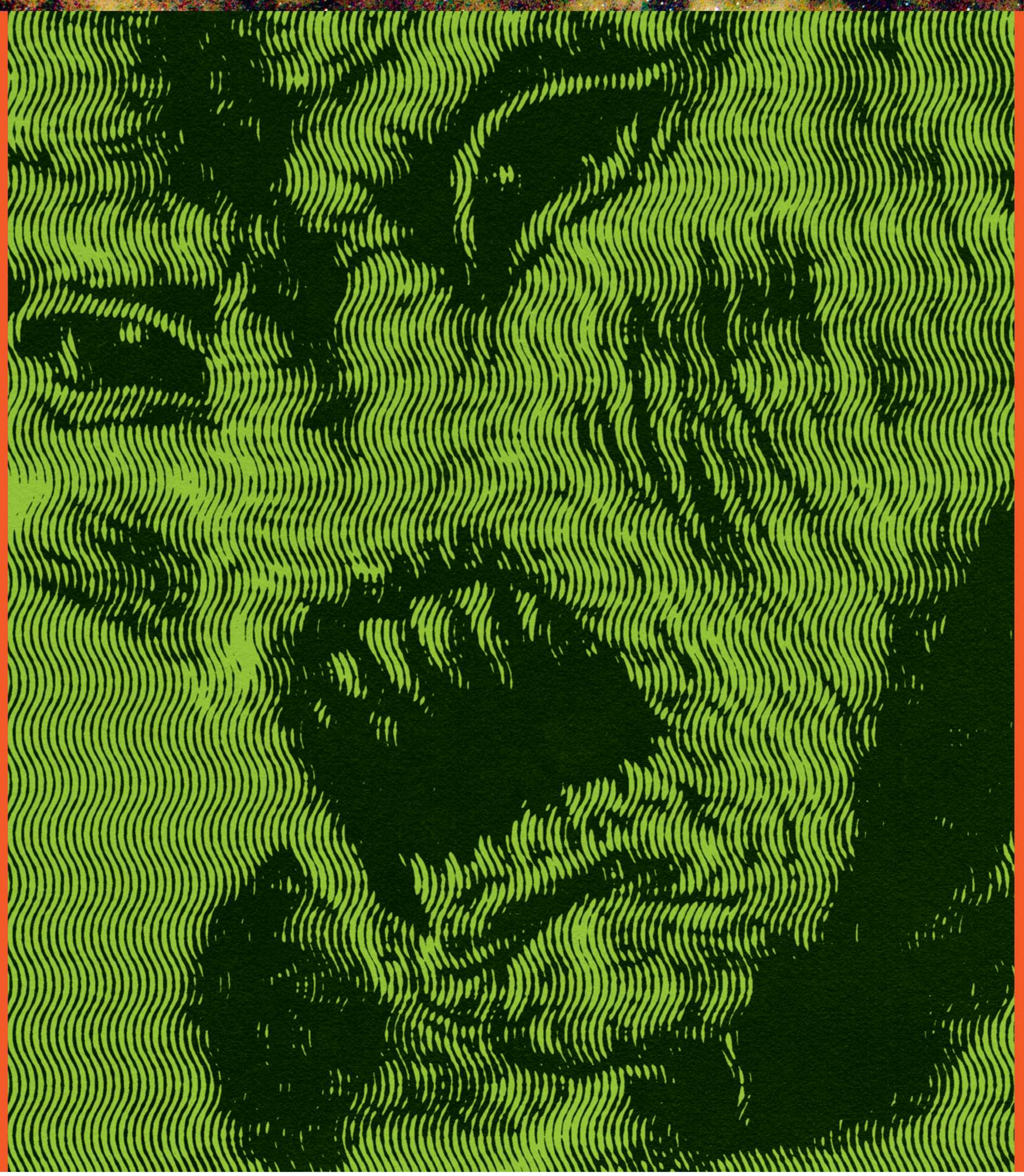
Due: I'm most excited that so many horror readers of all backgrounds will see the power of these storytellers and discover more of their work – as well as the work of so many other talented Black Horror writers who could not be included.

Out There Screaming *is on shelves from Random House on October 3.* 💀

By Scott Wampler

STEPHEN KING'S LITTLE GREEN MEN*

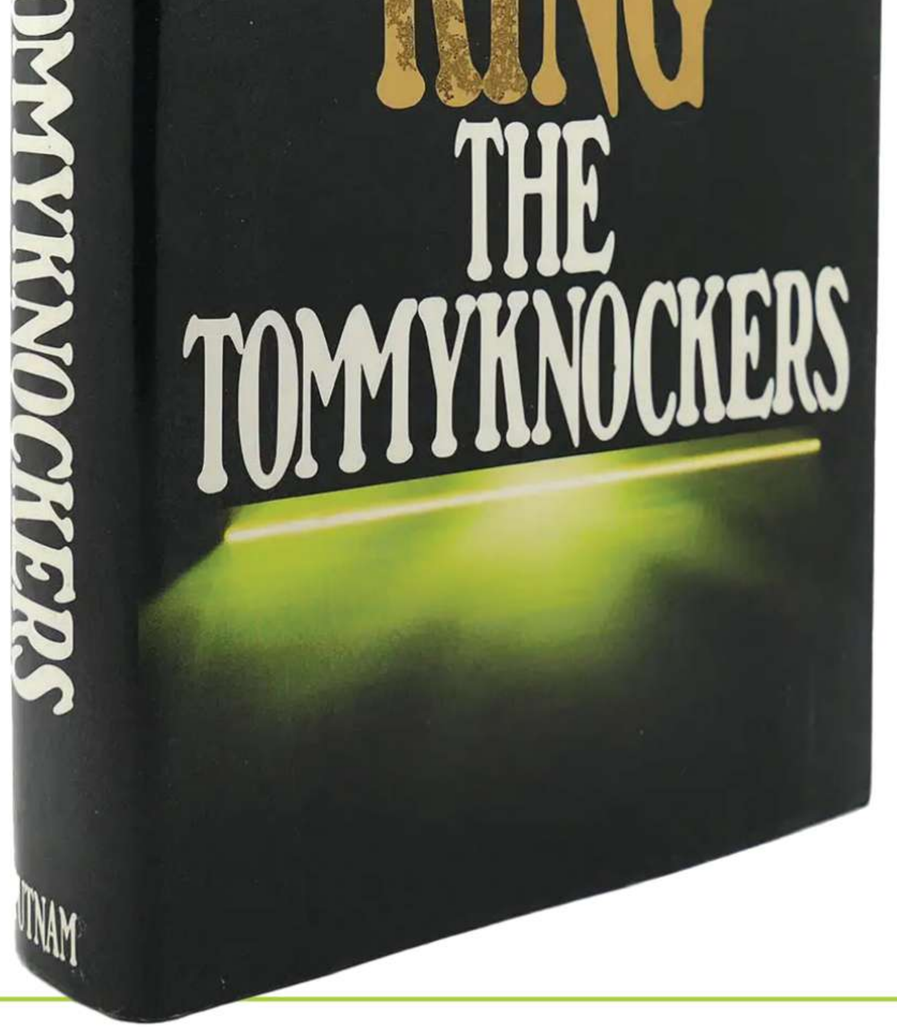
(*DOES NOT ACTUALLY CONTAIN LITTLE GREEN MEN)



Extraterrestrials are having a moment in the sun right now, a surge in popularity that has not been seen since the heydays of the mid-'90s, when alien abductions were being covered by *Unsolved Mysteries* and *Fire in the Sky* was terrifying the hell out of theatergoing audiences. Depending on who or what you believe, extraterrestrial life (if it exists!) could be friendly or could be hostile, but if you're wondering how America's Master of Horror feels about "little green men," you need only look at Stephen King's depiction of aliens for your answer. Long story short? He doesn't seem to think they're very friendly!

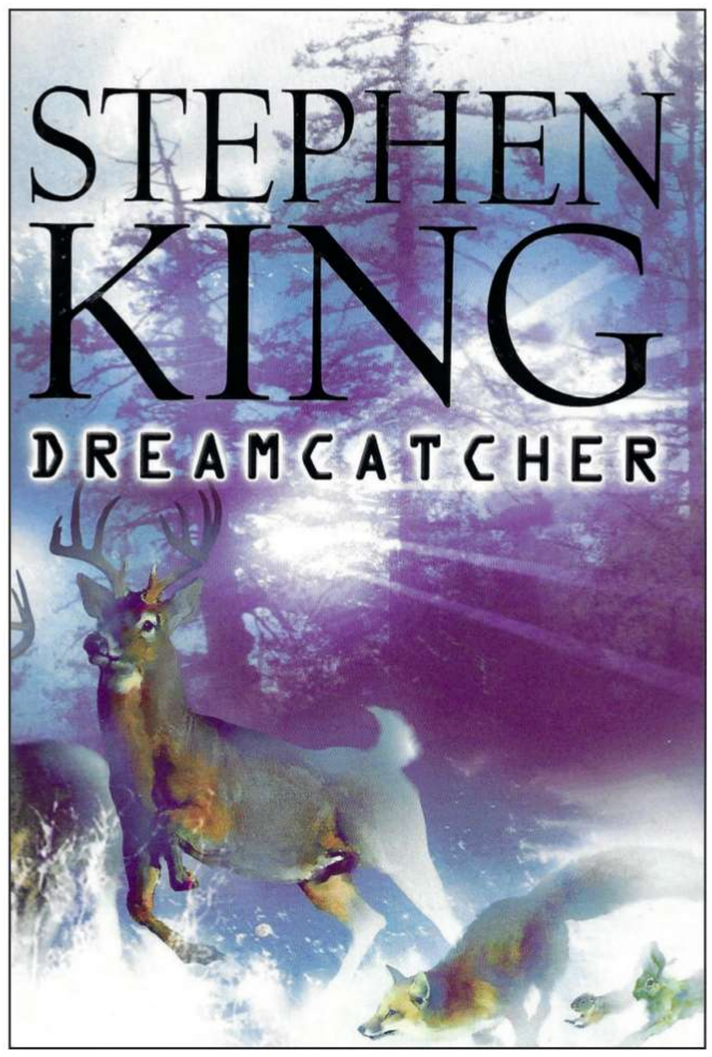
In 1987, King's *The Tommyknockers* introduced us to Bobbi Anderson, an author of western novels living in Haven, Maine. One day, while walking in the woods near her home, Bobbi quite literally stumbles upon a UFO that's buried deep in the ground; turns out, she tripped over the very edge of the thing, and before too long she's digging out the rest of it. Unearthing the ship has dire consequences for Bobbi, her friend Gard, and the people of Haven, with many of the townspeople finding themselves gifted with an alien form of hyper-intelligence. The townspeople use this gift (more of a curse, really; this is a horror novel we're talking about) in a variety of ways, slowly losing their minds and agency in the process, and when they do finally unearth that UFO and take a peek inside... well, things go from bad to worse.

The aliens of *The Tommyknockers* are strange, ultimately unknowable beings that are really there to serve as the delivery method for an extended allegory about the perils of addiction. (Y'know what else makes you feel hyper-intelligent and may well destroy your life? Cocaine.) We can contrast these extraterrestrials against those that appear in King's 2001 novel *Dreamcatcher*, where the creatures serve a more pulpy, literal purpose: to wipe out humanity as we know it.



Dreamcatcher begins with a group of friends heading out to a cabin deep in the woods of (where else?) Maine. Shortly after arriving, a man knocks on the cabin door. He's disheveled, rambling, clearly out of it and in need of a hot meal. Our heroes welcome this man into their cabin and do their best to patch him up, but soon enough a horrifying creature (a "shit weasel," in King's parlance) erupts from the man's body and starts claiming lives. This particular alien is the first alien life form we meet in *Dreamcatcher*, but we soon meet another: large enough to take a sizable bite out of a human being and armed with mind-control powers, these beings resemble the "Grey" aliens of classic UFO lore (while also being profoundly more dangerous), and have come to Earth to spread a poisonous red fungus that we assume will eventually take over the world... assuming our heroes can't stop them first, of course.

King returned to extraterrestrials about a decade later in *Under the Dome*, though the novel takes hundreds of pages before explicitly revealing their presence. In that tale, a gigantic, invisible dome suddenly appears over Chester's Mill, ME, trapping the townspeople in what basically amounts to an ant farm. Their reality quite literally turned into a microcosm overnight, the people of Chester's Mill (and the armed forces surrounding the dome) do everything they can to get out of their predicament, but nothing seems to work. Eventually we learn that the dome itself was

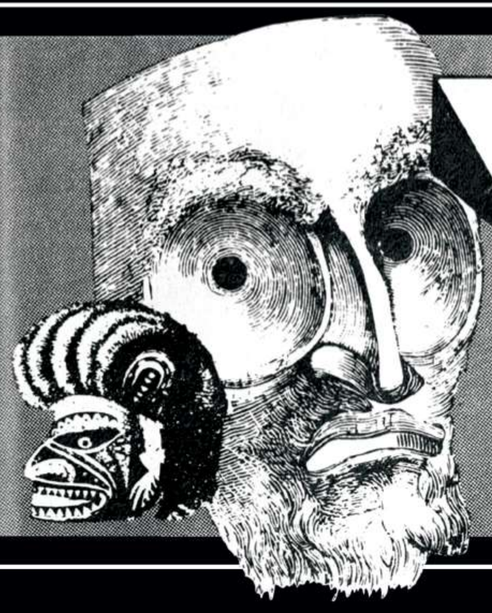


dropped on the town by a handful of mischievous alien youngsters who don't really understand what they're monkeying with, and it takes one of our lead characters communing with one of those creatures and appealing to its sense of empathy to get the dome removed. If all of this sounds wild, well, trust me: it's even wilder in context (and especially after a ~900-page build-up).

There are, of course, more Stephen King alien stories (one could even plead a case for *The Dark Tower* series' Low Men in Yellow Coats as interdimensional aliens), but these are the big ones, and in each, King almost always deploys these otherworldly beings as a means for wreaking havoc on his unsuspecting human characters. And yet, if alien life does exist and has been visiting our planet, as certain recent events would seem to suggest, it seems axiomatic that they aren't particularly hostile; any extraterrestrials capable of traversing the galaxy via technology that's light years beyond our own would surely have the ability to wipe us out at a moment's notice.

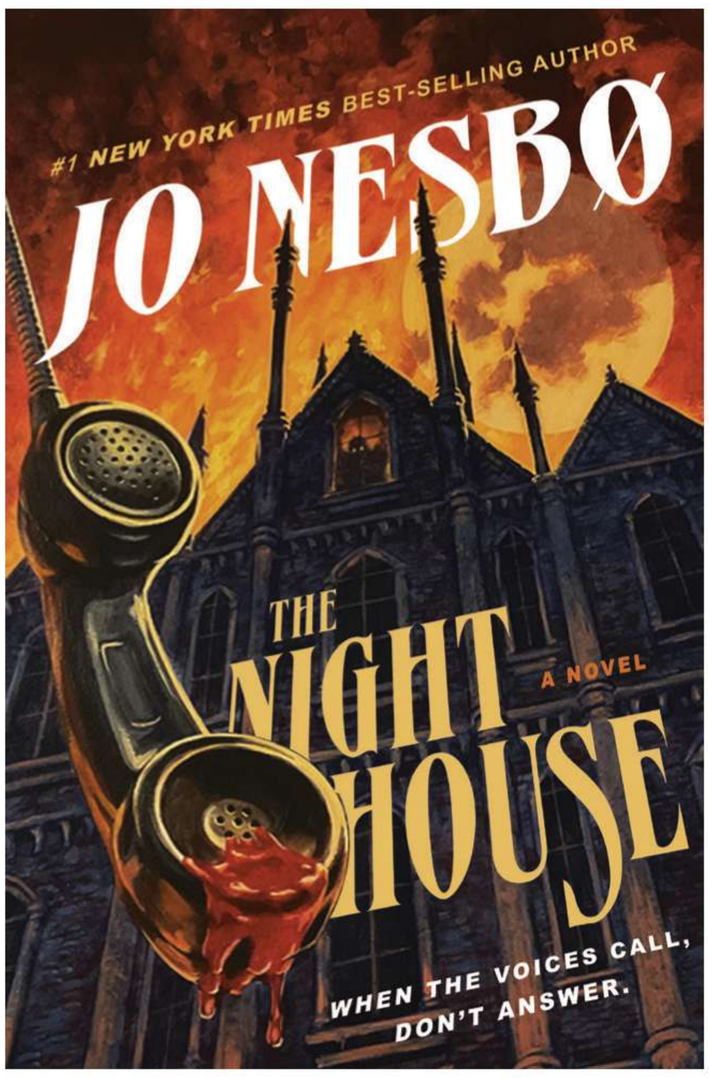
At least, that's what I keep telling myself. One really doesn't want to end up living in a timeline that includes Stephen King's brand of alien life.

You can listen to Scott Wampler (@ScottWamplerRIP) and Eric Vespe (@EricVespe) every Wednesday on THE KINGCAST (@Kingcast19), a Stephen King podcast for Stephen King obsessives, brought to you by the FANGORIA Podcast Network.



NIGHTMARE LIBRARY

BY AHLISSA EICHHORN



THE NIGHT HOUSE

DUE OUT:
10/03/2023

AUTHOR:
Jo Nesbø

PUBLISHER:
Knopf

What do you do when you witness something so unreal, so out of this world, that not a single soul will believe you? Do you stick to your story, or do you convince yourself that you're mistaken? After watching his friend get sucked into a telephone receiver, 14-year-old Richard faces this very same dilemma in *The Night House*. Richard is the new kid in town and has already earned a reputation as a bully. When another boy goes missing soon after, all fingers point to him. Despite the bad press, he tells police what he saw and sets out to investigate clues that lead him to an abandoned house in Mirror Forest. In it he finds traces of dark magic that's possessing the town and everyone in it. But what if none of this actually happened? What if Richard is a liar?

It's easy to have set expectations when first stepping into *The Night House*. The tale of a troubled teen encountering something supernatural is approachable, familiar. All is well until the exposition takes a sudden dip and readers feel the cold-water realization that they can't trust a single word. This type of literary deception is always welcome when done right and Nesbø pulls it off without a hitch. Even with an unlikeable, first-person narration, readers will still be sticking around to see how batty things can get. *Scooby-Doo* imagery and intense *In The Mouth of Madness* moments work together for a satisfying, full-circle payoff on the concluding page. Some will be gobsmacked, others will be pissed off. All will agree that they'll never forget it.

"Let Him In is spider legs across your neck, a snake caressing your ankles, a shadow outside your bedroom at midnight."
—NAT CASSIDY, author of Mary: An Awakening of Terror and Nestlings
LET HIM IN
WILLIAM FRIEND

LET HIM IN

DUE OUT:
10/03/2023

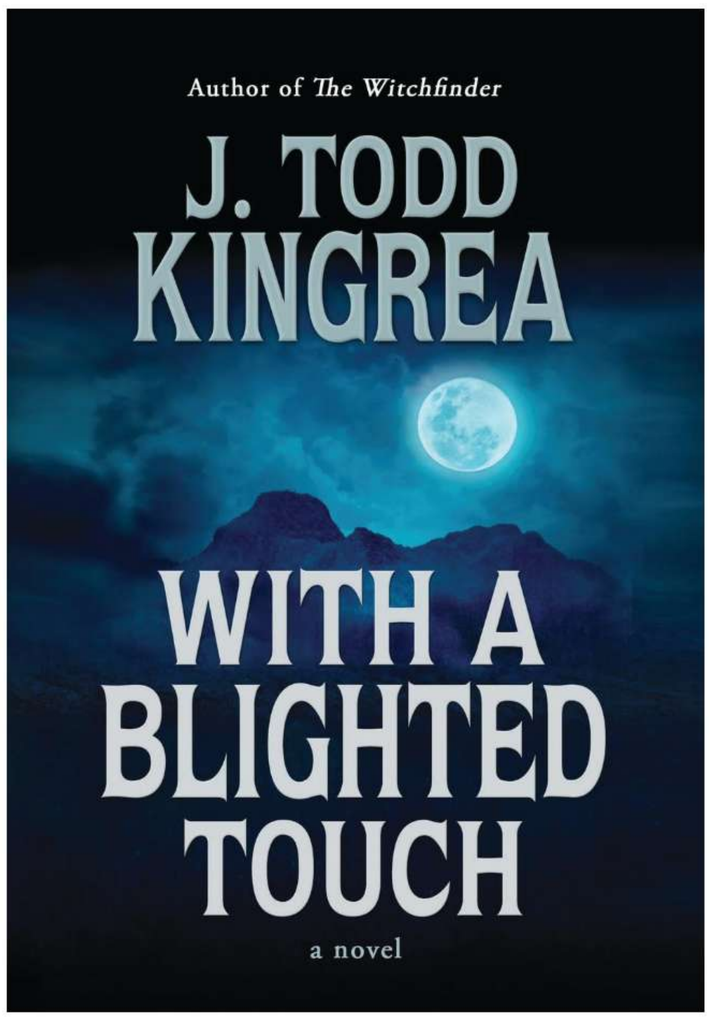
AUTHOR:
William Friend

PUBLISHER:
Poisoned Pen Press

Grief hangs like a cloud over Hart House ever since the senseless death of Alfie's wife. It's been months since the incident, but one night he wakes to the pattering of his young twin daughters. They tell him there's a man in their room – he tells them they're just having a nightmare. Struggling with his own mourning, he can't see the harm that's waiting around the corner. The girls begin spending more and more time talking about their friend and his plans to take them away. Alfie depends on the girls' aunt for help, who agrees to see them as her own psychiatry patients. The more they explore the twins' synchronized imaginations, the deeper Alfie feels haunted by nightmares and the sensation that he's never quite alone in the house his wife grew up in.

What stands out most in *Let Him In* is the emotion within the writing. The lyrical phrasing lends itself toward the gothic moodiness of the setting. Alternating points of view build tension chapter by chapter, forming a thick air of wracking anxiety. The imagery breathes in dread and exhales distress. Overusing the word "creepy" is easy to do when describing any scary story, but twins will always get that moniker, especially when they're mingled with paranormal devices. But that's exactly what this is – creepy as all hell. Friend even incorporates cultish, *Hereditary* vibes for all the psychological horror junkies out there. But readers, pay attention. This title is cunning in its approach and freaky in its delivery. Take it on with the lights off at your own risk.

A REFRESHING ASPECT OF THIS FANDOM IS THE UNSPOKEN AGREEMENT THAT IT'S OKAY TO LIKE HORROR NOVELS BUT NOT HORROR MOVIES (AND VICE VERSA). Whether it's a fat 450-page book full of wild terrors or a crisp hour-and-twenty-minute romp tinged with bloody surprises, we just want to be scared, and there's no disrespect in that. In this October volume, we're blurring the lines a bit. The novels showcased here embody serious cinematic flair without sacrificing immersive storytelling. Grab a seat and crack open that spine – it's showtime!



WITH A BLIGHTED TOUCH

DUE OUT:
10/24/2023

AUTHOR:
J. Todd Kingrea

PUBLISHER:
BHC Press

Black Rock is a small Tennessee town that failed musician Kit MacNeil escaped from 18 years ago. When called back to mourn the loss of his mother, he reunites with an old friend who gets him up to speed on the disturbing deaths in the area since he's been gone. Kit's impulse to outrun the past grows the longer he stays, for he knows what happened to him as a child has something to do with the sudden upcropping of pale, malformed creatures watching his every move. Soon enough, the murky truth about the town's curse wriggles free to the surface and fate forces him to protect his loved ones from an ancient threat.

With A Blighted Touch is a disgusting, fetid feast for all five senses. Kingrea pens descriptions that'll leave you gagging for more while wishing you could unread them. The antagonist is a terrifying spin-off of a Cherokee myth that feels right at home with the superstars of folk and rural horror. The pacing is fast and stocked with concise action scenes that pull the reader right to the edge. As serious as the tone is, there's an underlying sense of excitement and play within the prose that makes this downright fun to read. Its characters have natural thoughts and reactions in an unnatural setting. You'll feel for them and feel alongside them when they stare in awe at the evil before them. This type of story will sit well with the monster fans out there or anyone looking for a (safe) terror trip through a podunk town.

JOIN THE TERROR TELETYPE!
News, editorials, rare images (as in, never before seen online) from the Fango vault, special merch deals and more!
It's like getting a mini issue of FANGORIA every week in your inbox.
bit.ly/TerrorTeletype
THE TERROR TELETYPE
FANGORIA
FIRST IN FRIGHT SINCE 1979

Contributors' Crypt

Here's where you can follow some of our contributors on Instagram. Not gonna lie, we've lost track of the other platforms. Threads? Who has the time?

Sean Abley ..... @seanabley
Barbara Crampton .. @barbaracrampton
Ahlissa Eichhorn .. @hauntedbydeadlines
Laura Moss ..... @mxlauramoss
Richard Newby ..... @rnewb
Ve Neill ..... @therealve
Amber T ..... @hornbloodfire
Vannah Taylor ..... @sirendeathcult
Brandon Wainerdi .... @actuallybrandon
Scott Wampler ..... @mayorofdoorcity
Alyse Wax ..... @alyse.wax

Things to Come

Fango faves return next issue to warm up your holiday season: from FREAKY screenwriter Michael Kennedy and TRAGEDY GIRLS director Tyler MacIntyre comes IT'S A WONDERFUL KNIFE, and Jenn Wexler (THE RANGER) is back with THE SACRIFICE GAME! Plus the Best Kills of 2023 and all the usual creepy coverage you've come to expect from Team Fango. See you this winter!

CLASSIFIED AD VAULT

B, welcome to Haddonfield!
Happy Halloween -A

Simkins- Have a Spooky School Year!
-The G's

Happy Birthday, Spud! We love you so much! Love, Mom and Dad

"BRUCE JUiCE," Played the new *Texas Chain Saw* GAME with you on the first night and you didn't STOP, "SNAP! CRACKLE! POPPPiNG!!" your headset, in and out, shocking my EARs and your wife didn't STOP screaming like a FiNAL giRL all night LONG?!!....When we PLAY again?

Gomes - These are things I like doing with you: morning walks, Thai food, all other food, spotting Cooper (?) hawks, summoning our friends the cardinals, catching the occasional Northern Flicker, and hearing the screech of the blue jay (hehehe). <3

Congratulations to Ashlee and Michael from our friends at Fango! We hope you ch-ch-cherish your wedding day and have many years of ha-ha-happiness. Hopefully Freddy won't take the date personally...

Chauncey isn't imaginary - and he's not your friend!!!

No better place to hear horror reviews than Rewind of the Living Dead. We take a deep dive every week on the best horror films on the planet, both new and old!

I have a crush on Ham Raimi's dad.

Shout out for THE CALL (2020) dir: Lee Chung-hyeon. Superb! pd x

Listen to Giallo of the Month Club. It's the gift that keeps on giving...the whole year! Podcast available everywhere. Follow @gialloclub on Instagram.

Check out our podcast from Plymouth, Massachusetts for horror reviews and discussions! @AmericasHometownHorrorPod

Love HELLRAISER? Read Nathan Ballingrud's infernally magnificent collection WOUNDS (aka THE ATLAS OF HELL) from Saga Press.

Happy 1st Wedding Anniversary to my incredible husband George! We bonded over horror and have built our life around on all things spooky. Love you bunches -Jolene

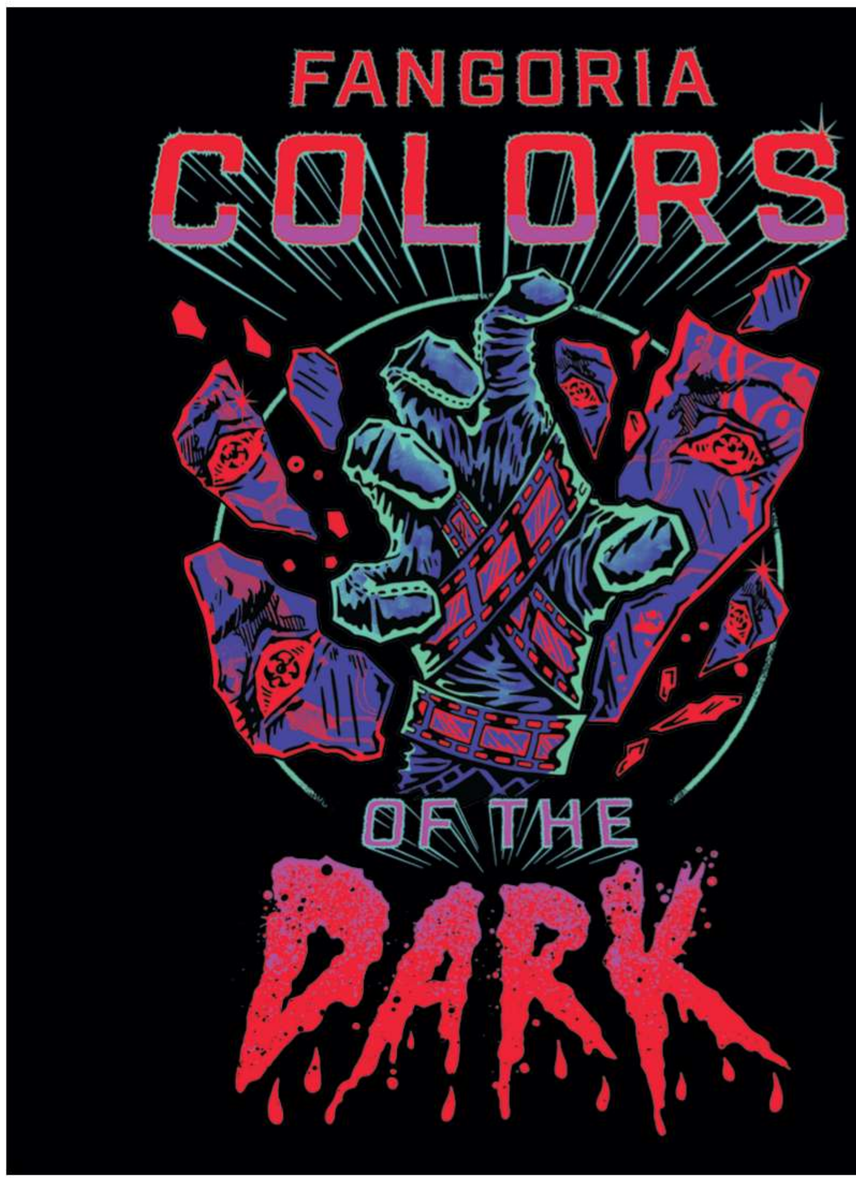
For chill, glitchy, psychedelic analog video art, follow @madonno_productions on Insta and YT.

Montgomery College is happy to announce that there are 3 unexpected vacancies for the film program! Join the wait list today.

The Carnal Extremities podcast takes a deep dive into your favorite extreme horror movies and pairs them up with a metal album for the ultimate sight/sound analysis. Available now on Apple Podcasts and Spotify.

If you dig our fanged & furry friends from films like THE HOWLING & DOG SOLDIERS, *run*, to your nearest indie bookstore & pick up Slasher Nation columnist Stephen Graham Jones's horror novel MONGRELS.

A professionally unprofessional podcast focusing on the past, present and future of cinema with movie retrospectives, reviews and interviews with fellow filmmakers. Follow on Twitter @TheWafflePress



JOIN HOSTS DR. REBEKAH MCKENDRY (PROFESSOR, FANGORIA, WRITER-DIRECTOR) AND ELRIC KANE (PROFESSOR, PURE CINEMA PODCAST, FILMMAKER) AS THEY TAKE A DEEP LOOK AT THE HORROR GENRE.

Each show explores a specific part of horror history, key players, franchises, deep cut titles, important films, and interviews with some of the genres' biggest icons.

LISTEN NOW

Listen on Apple Podcasts

Spotify

STITCHER

CREATURE COSMETICS

FOR THE CREATURE IN ALL OF US.

CREATURECOSMETICLABS.COM

FEATURING OFFICIALLY LICENSED COLLECTIONS FROM:

H.P. Lovecraft's classic tale of horror

RE-ANIMATOR

...It will scare you to pieces.

Trick 'r Treat

SLEEPAWAY CAMP

EVIL DEAD 2

DEAD BY DAWN

THE RETURN of the LIVING DEAD™

DAMIEN LEONE'S

TERRIFIER

AND MORE COMING SOON!

EXCLUSIVE OFFER FOR FANGORIA READERS!

USE CODE: "FANGO20" FOR 20% OFF YOUR FIRST ORDER!

TOM SAVINI'S

Special Make-Up Effects Program

AT DOUGLAS EDUCATION CENTER

MAKE YOUR MONSTER

Become a practical effects artist in Tom Savini's Special Make-Up Effects Program.
This 16-month Associate Degree Program teaches you every aspect of special make-up effects… Everything from design, anatomy, sculpting and mold making to casting, painting, finishing, creating eyes and teeth and computer sculpting in Zbrush. Graduates work as professional effects artists in FX Shops, Television, Film, Medical Prosthetics, Haunted Attractions and Theater. The list goes on and on!

16-MONTH *DEGREE PROGRAM COVERING:

Cosmetic Make-Up	Appliance Prosthetics	Character Make-Up	Mold Making
Sculpting	Hair & Beard Application	Eyes and Teeth	Anatomy
Creature Design	Airbrush Illustration	Animatronics	Props
Painting Techniques	Budgets	Life Casting	ZBrush

Sean Wessman
3rd SEMESTER

"Our students' attitude is 'This is school?'...
because they are having so much fun
making their dreams come true
creating monsters and make-up effects...
plus... **THEY GET A DEGREE!**"*

Tom Savini

Ambria Pierson
4th SEMESTER

Jacob Asher
4th SEMESTER

Spencer Kies
4th SEMESTER

TOM SAVINI offers talent-based SCHOLARSHIP www.dec.edu for details

STUDENT GALLERY AT: DEC.EDU/TS

DOUGLAS
Education Center
130 Seventh Street • Monessen, PA 15062

1.800.413.6013 **DEC.EDU**

Housing is available through Boss Development, Inc. · www.bdihousing.com
Financial aid is available to those who qualify. *16-month Associate in Specialized Business Degree Program.
Tom Savini will award a "Certificate of Excellence" to those graduates with exceptional portfolios!
THIS SCHOOL IS AUTHORIZED UNDER FEDERAL LAW TO ENROLL NONIMMIGRANT ALIEN STUDENTS.